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August 31 2025

THE HELL OF HAITI

Louise Callaghan comes face to face with the gangs ruling a desperate nation

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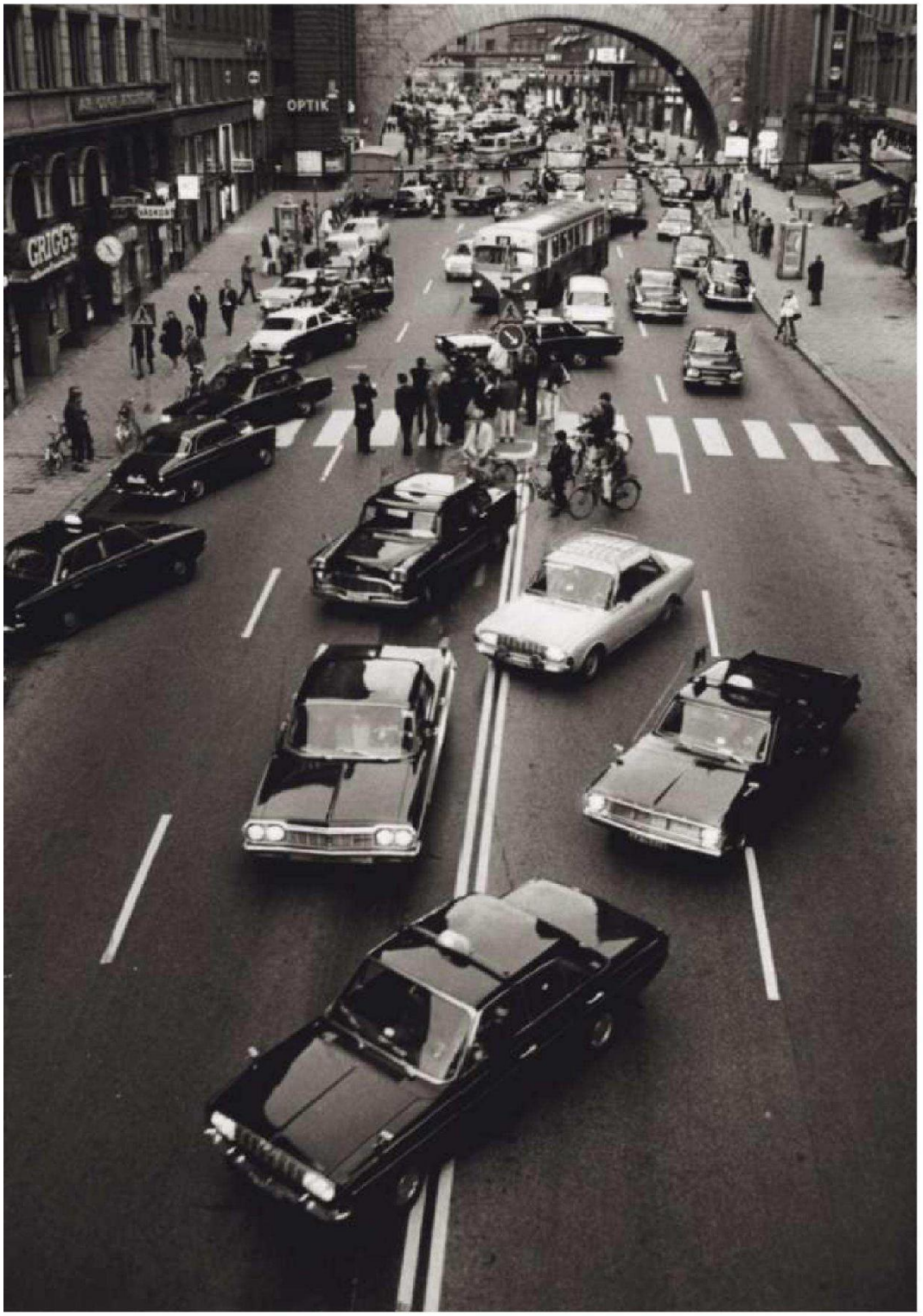
THE SUNDAY TIMES *magazine*



THIS WEEK IN 1967

Drivers in Stockholm make the transition from driving on the left-hand side of the road to the right at 5am on September 3. It was known as Dagen H ("H Day", the H standing for *Hogertrafik*, Swedish for right-hand traffic). All non-essential traffic was banned from 1am to 6am. The switch led to a temporary reduction in accidents despite fears of the opposite.

31.08.2025

5 Phoebe Luckhurst
I have too many friends

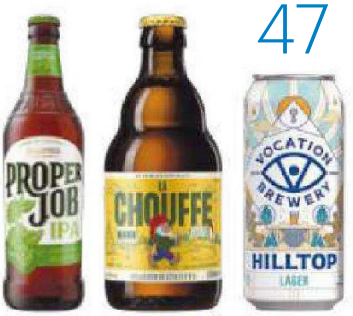
6 Relative Values
The father-and-son polo players — and pals of Prince Harry — *Adolfo* and *Poroto Cambiaso*

8 Robin Wright
The actress tells *Laura Pullman* about her regrets as a mother and finding love in England

16 Nick Clegg, tech millionaire
The former deputy PM on what it was like working for Mark Zuckerberg. By *Josh Glancy*

24 Looking after Johnnie
Life with the late BBC DJ Johnnie Walker was never simple, says his widow, Tiggy

30 COVER: Gang land
Is there any hope for Haiti? *Louise Callaghan* reports



41 Table talk
French dishes by *Matthew Ryle*, *Charlotte Ivers* is down the pub, *Will Lyons* finds bargain chardonnay and *Pete Brown* picks Tesco's finest beers

48 Health and fitness
How to properly clean your teeth — and your gym kit

50 Jeremy Clarkson
Just two stars for the BMW M5

58 A Life in the Day
The actress *Celia Imrie*

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THE VALUE OF INVESTMENTS CAN GO UP AND DOWN, AND BUYASSOCIATION ALWAYS RECOMMENDS THAT YOU SHOULD SEEK INDEPENDENT FINANCIAL ADVICE. *JLL, 2025.

PHOEBE LUCKHURST

I'm counting the cost of "friendflation"

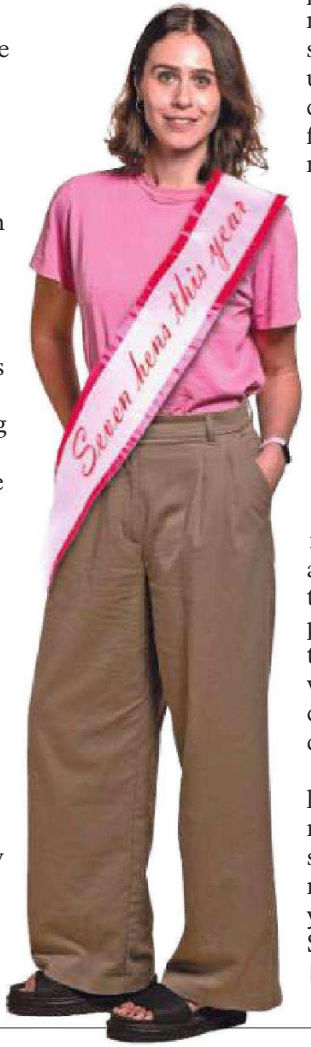
At what cost, friendship? On the one hand, you cannot put a price on kinship, connection, on that person who'll — as the overplayed *Friends* theme song goes — be there for you when the rain starts to pour. On the other, one recent estimate puts the figure at £779.

That magic number is now the average price of a UK stag or hen weekend — £1,200 if it's abroad. If you'd like another way to measure it: the average cost of being a wedding guest has hit £700 for those aged 25-34. Ooft. This bill is known as "friendflation" — the rising financial hit of celebrating mates' milestones. Your job's a joke, you're broke, your love life's DOA — and now you have to spend almost a grand on someone's "I do" in the Cotswolds. Oh, and JD Vance has closed the pub down the road.

In August's salad days, after two "sten dos" (stag-hen hybrids where, radically, male and female friends celebrate together), three weddings (one abroad) and a holiday to celebrate a marriage, I will admit friendflation is biting. Ah, my diamond is too large, my crown too shiny — I have too many friends! It goes without saying — though I will in case any of them are reading this — I love these celebrations. Watching a friend get married (really) never gets old. On a sten do in Amsterdam recently, I laughed so much my face got cramp. When the ship goes down, or AI deletes civilisation on a whim, in the moments before I go, remembering all this will make me glad I was alive.

Admittedly, I will remember less fondly the one-upmanship around the canapés at whoever's turn it is this weekend. "Seven weddings this year," someone will say through a mouthful of arancini. A sympathetic chorus. "We're on nine," someone else says, "and two are in Provence." But wait: someone has one in South Africa. They're going to have to take seven days of annual leave! This is said with the vaguely haunted air of one processing a trauma. Standing around a spa hotel in Bath gripping a sweaty glass of prosecco — it's our generation's Vietnam.

Incidentally, if the conversation sounds dire, you try seeing the same friends every weekend for a whole summer.



Or people you don't know very well, because if you have a long-term partner or are already married like me, you are rewarded not just with kinship, connection and that person who'll (contractually) be there for you when the rain starts to pour — but also with a new circle to whom you are connected-ish by law. No wonder people complain. Your friend's husband is bad enough — his mates must be awful.

Fine, fine, my millennial generation loves to create a problem — unnecessarily expensive milestones, social media, gluten intolerance — and complain about it. And sure, this is one of our least sympathetic traits. But cut us some slack for a moment. Because I think when we complain about all this, in a roundabout way we're fretting about something else. It's defensive: milestones remind us of change and — if you squint — death.

Now do you see why it's easier to talk about how the Premier Inn in Berwick-upon-Tweed costs £138 a night — and that doesn't even include breakfast?

We're new to ageing and still finding our feet. When we met the people whose milestones we're celebrating, we were mere hatchlings. Maybe it was freshers week, or the squalid flatshares of our twenties, when everyone's job was rubbish, few people were dating the person they'd end up with (thank God) and life was full of possibility. This stage felt as though it would never end and we were all in it together.

No more: these lovely milestones emphasise how much keeps changing. On stags, hens and stens, we are divided into parents (don't make it past midnight; talk about nursery fees) and nonparents (do make it past midnight; talk about how much their back hurts the next day). Wedding seating plans place those who've relocated to Guildford next to those of us who can't see why anyone would ever leave London. When did they get so… old? Wait, I'm not that old, am I?

So yes, it's expensive, and no, we don't have any holiday allowance left to go on an actual holiday. But really, we carp around the canapés because we know at some point — quite soon, actually — it will all stop. No more weddings, no more hens, no more laughing until your face hurts. We'll have to be proper grown-ups. So £779 — the price of youth? Bargain ■

Matt Rudd is away

GOOD NEWS!

A herd of 300 hungry goats is helping prevent wildfires in the mountains of Catalonia, northeast Spain. Led by nomadic goatherders, the animals graze on dry shrubs and other combustible vegetation to create natural firebreaks in the drought-hit region. The project helped to reduce the number of wildfires last year and the regional government has decided to extend the scheme ■

By Yasmin Choudhury

LUCY YOUNG/TIMES MEDIA LIMITED, SHUTTERSTOCK

RELATIVE VALUES

Adolfo and Poroto Cambiaso

King Charles is a better polo player than Harry, say the father-and-son stars from Argentina

Adolfo

Poroto was born in 2005 while I was in the middle of a polo game. I'd left my wife, María, with a friend of mine at the farm where we live, an hour from Buenos Aires. He would be able to drive her to the hospital, just in case anything happened. I was playing a qualifier at the time, so I couldn't miss the game, could I?

During the match her waters broke, but my team-mates didn't tell me at first. In the middle of the fourth chukka, one of the players told me María was in hospital. I said to him, "Give me the phone." I was still on my horse. I spoke to the doctor and said, "Doctor, how much time do I have?" Not much more than 20 minutes, he said. The playing field was ten minutes from the hospital, so I played one more chukka and then I went. I made it on time.

María's reaction? Oh, she didn't know that I'd spoken with the doctor like that. She would have killed me — can you imagine? But it became a funny family story.

Poroto is 19 and my second child — Mia, 22, is my oldest, and Myla, 14, my youngest. All three play polo but I don't really come from a polo family. My mother played at the weekends but my father, another Adolfo, was a championship surfer, a South American champion. Me, I've always loved horses, and so do my kids. It's like they were born on a horse. But not my wife. She's scared of horses. Even today, she comes with us wherever we play but she can't watch us.

My girls are not professional, so they don't get paid, but they still play a lot. They love it. Only my son gets paid. You see, the female game is not as big as the men's game — yet. We are working on that.

I've played with Prince Harry in the US. Last year they were in Palm Beach, Florida — he came with Meghan to watch a match during the US Open. We always share those moments around polo. I believe he is a great ambassador for the game — just like the rest of his family. In fact I've played with all three of them, William and Carlos, your king, too. The best? Oh, Carlos. He is really pretty good.

People think polo is very glamorous, full of playboys and, yes, royals. But this I can tell you is not the reality. The reality is being in a barn with horses, Monday to Monday, working all the time, no time off. Sure, you see the King in the stands, but this is not how we live. How we live is on a farm. It's hard work.

My wife and I decided we would home school our children, so we could travel the world with polo. We would spend three months of the year in Argentina — where they did go to regular school — but otherwise we had a teacher fly with us wherever we went, to Palm Beach, to England, Spain, Santa Barbara in California, then back to Argentina. Study in the morning, polo in the afternoon. This means we are always together, always very close. We are a team.

My wife is our psychologist, pretty much. I'm good with the girls — they tell me about everything, including boyfriends — while Poroto goes to my wife to talk. It's a good arrangement.

Poroto was always good on a horse, a natural. He always knew he wanted to be professional. People wonder how I feel about my son's success. He has beaten all my records. He won the Gold Cup when he was 14, I won it when I was 17. He won the Argentine Open at 17 — I was 19. In recent years we've been playing on opposing teams. I'm very proud of him, but when we play against each other I want to beat him.

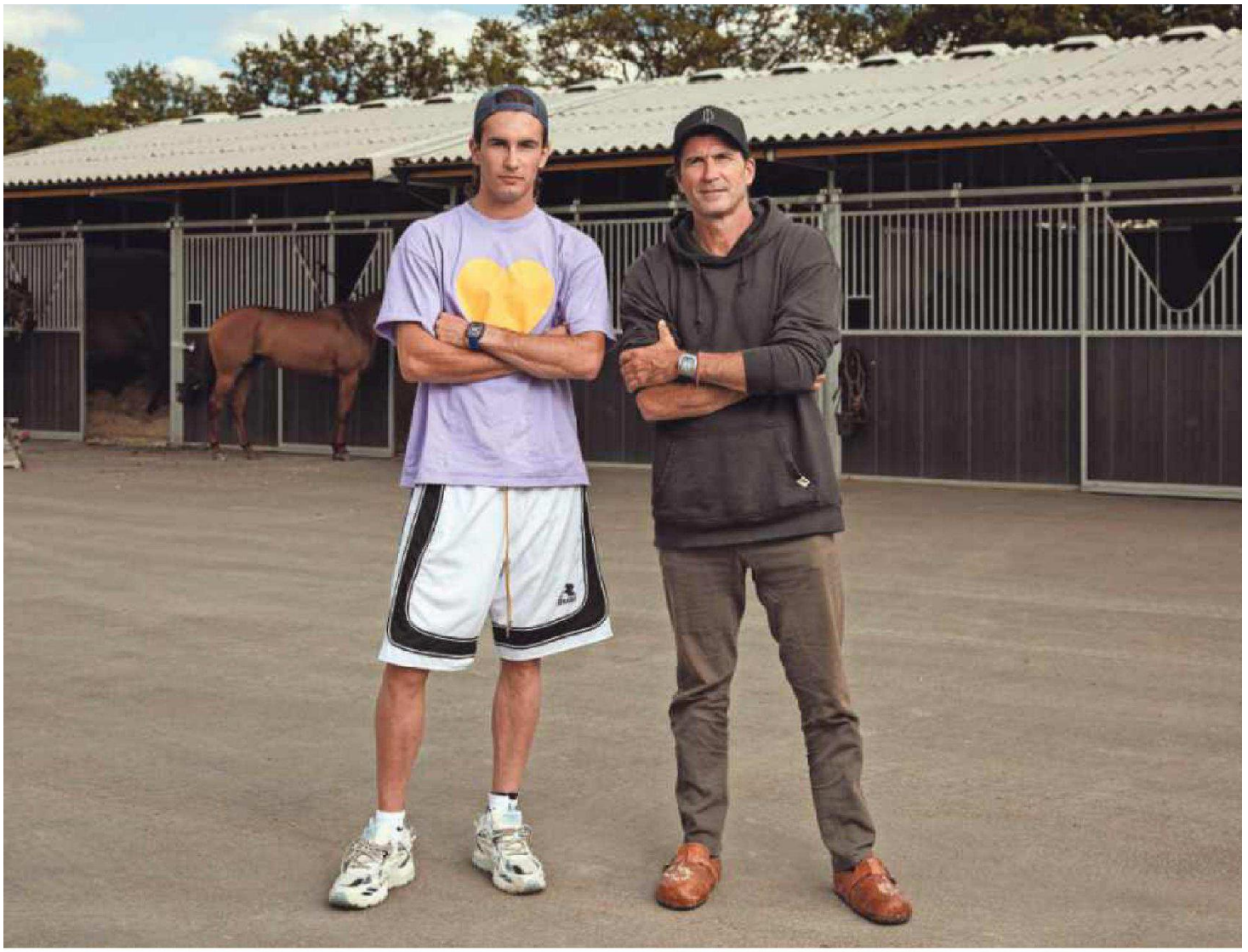
If we are not playing polo we are playing golf, or we are visiting my father to go surfing. We like competition and we love sport.

Today, in Argentina, María and I live with our youngest, Myla, while Poroto and Mia rent another house for themselves. But their place is nearby, five minutes away. It's how we like it.

Another player told me María had gone into labour. I played one more chukka, then went to the hospital

Main: Poroto, 19, and Adolfo, 50, at their stables in Berkshire. Right: Poroto makes his debut, aged 14, alongside his father in Argentina's Triple Crown tournament, 2020

PORTRAIT BY TOM BARNES



Poroto

My earliest memories of my father are at the farm, and always with horses. Also that we were flying everywhere with him for polo matches, to England, to America. I remember him winning everything.

I like to compete too. Growing up, I played every sport. I loved football but I was better at polo — horses are the best animals in the world. Being on a horse, for me, is natural, like maybe being on a bicycle for you is natural. I'd come home from school and get straight on a horse.

My father was my trainer and, yes, he was quite a hard trainer. He wanted us to do things that were not normal, like he could do, and to be better than anyone else. But he is not so hard any more, now that my sisters and I play all the time. Now we are more like team-mates.

I started playing professionally at 13, 14. That is not typical — it's young — but it was good for me to turn professional and to make money for myself. For 14 years old, it was very good money. My parents put it in a bank for me, but as soon as I got to spend it, I spent it on horses — what else?

I think I knew I didn't have a normal life, but I prefer it like this. Normal life for me happens when I go back to Argentina and spend time with my friends. Otherwise, all I want to do is play polo.

Playing against my father is great, but it's important for me to win. We have played against each other in the US Open two years running. I won the first time, which you see in the Netflix documentary series *Polo* that Harry and Meghan made, and he was not happy. When he won the following year, I was not happy. If I have to lose, I prefer to lose against my father. He is the best player in the world. I am not as good as him — yet. He does things no other polo player can. He was thinking of retiring five years ago, at 45, but his body is even stronger now. We both work hard not to get injured.

We do have outside interests — I still like football — but we are very much a polo family. We get together for dinner and talk about the games we play. We travel together, spend Christmas together — although last year I was with friends for new year. That was strange, but also good, I think. It's nice to be with friends from time to time. But we always come back together ■

Interviews by Nick Duerden.

Adolfo Cambiaso won a historic ninth Gold Cup last month at Cowdray Park Polo Club, West Sussex, where matches continue until September 21; cowdraypolo.co.uk

STRANGE HABITS

Adolfo on Poroto

He likes to line things up neatly — his bag, his phone — everything in its place

Poroto on Adolfo

He doesn't have any strange habits. He doesn't believe in luck. He believes in hard work and routine

IT'S LIBERATING TO BE DONE WITH SEARCHING

Married three times, including to the Hollywood hell-raiser Sean Penn, the House of Cards actress Robin Wright has swapped frenetic LA for tranquillity in the Chilterns. And down the pub one afternoon, she met her perfect man

INTERVIEW BY LAURA PULLMAN PORTRAITS BY SANE SEVEN

It

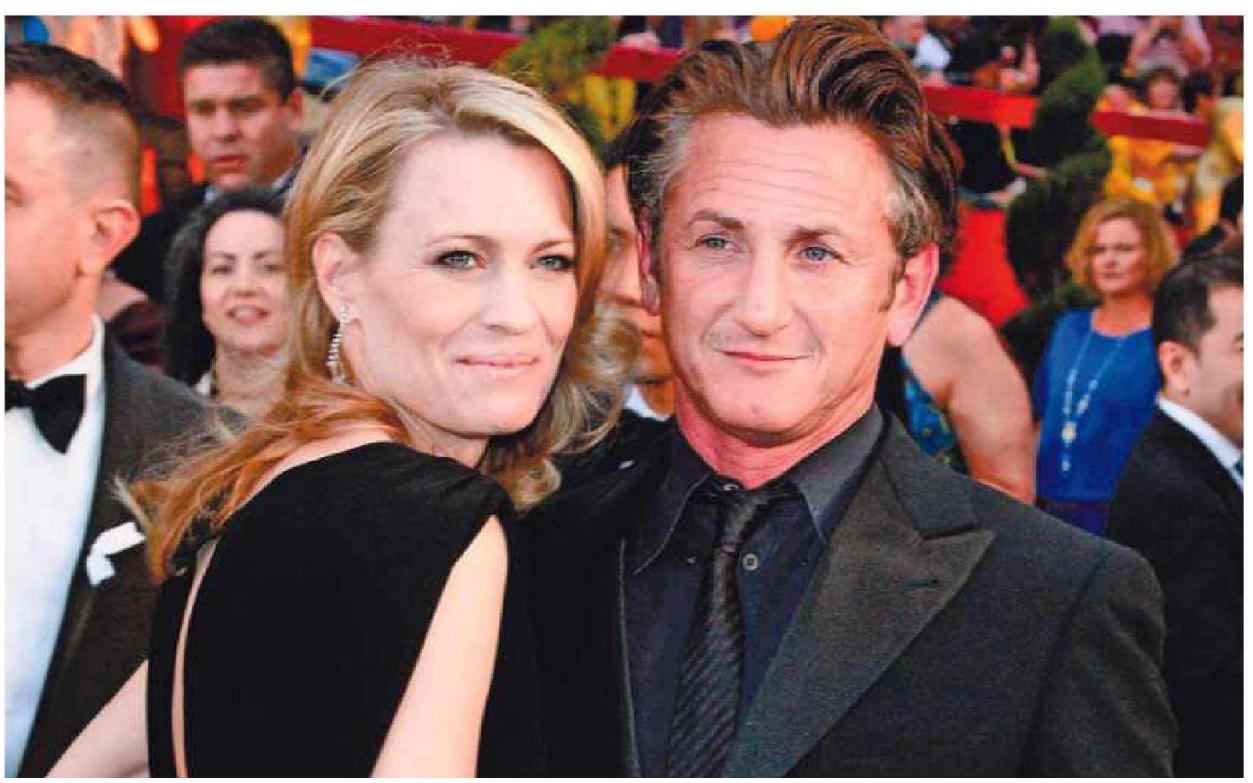
was as a 16-year-old at school in southern California that Robin Wright first took mushrooms. Decades later, aged 59, she is still partial to the occasional trip.

"It's great. It's a therapy different than alcohol," she says. "It's why it's used medicinally. I've done three journeys with psilocybin."

These guided journeys — one in Costa Rica, two in the States — involved no alcohol for a week, no food for 24 hours and then a dose of "plant medicine" while experts monitored her as she headed off on her trip. "You don't know if you're there for an hour or 15 hours," the American actress says. "You're fully awake, coherent, talking, moving. You've got music in your ears that's beautiful and resonant. Sounds that are activating your psyche on different layers. You're basically seeing your own soul."

Passengers on these journeys typically set an intention, something in their life they're hoping to shift. For the thrice-divorced Wright, she wanted to give some breathing space to her two children, whom she had with one of her ex-husbands, the hell-raising actor Sean Penn. "It's this," Wright says of the relationship she had with her daughter, Dylan, 34, and son, Hopper, 32, hugging a sofa cushion tightly to herself "because I'm so scared they're going to hurt themselves. I wanted to cut that but still love them the way I love them."

We are meeting on a hot August morning near Reading, which might sound unglamorous for a Hollywood veteran of 40 years, but the seven-bedroom Airbnb she is renting for the week is anything but. She is bouncing from property to property while working in the UK on *The Girlfriend*, a new six-episode drama for Prime Video. There are boxes and bags of belongings everywhere; padding around are Rusty, a deaf and blind yellow labrador, and



With her second husband, Sean Penn, at the Oscars in 2009. Above: with Kevin Spacey in the TV series House of Cards, 2015

Rocky, a black labrador puppy whom Wright affectionately calls "f***knuckle".

We sweep various bits of clutter off a sofa to sit down, including *The Ladybird Book of Dating*. I arrived expecting a guarded professionalism. In fact she's warm, curious and open. For starters, in *The Girlfriend* she plays a bisexual woman in an open marriage, so I ask for her thoughts on "ethical non-monogamy", as polyamorous bed-hopping has been rebranded. "Wait, this is a title?" Wright asks. After giving an eye-roll at the new term, she recalls the time in her thirties when she was at a party on a superyacht at the Cannes Film Festival. "There was this huge American director, who's no longer with us, and I got propositioned by his wife. To. Have. A. Threesome," she says, spelling out the proposal. "I realised when I was on the boat that they were all elderly and they were all swingers… This was Swingerville." Thankfully the yacht was moored in harbour and she disembarked.

During our morning together the only question she won't answer is whether she would work again with her *House of Cards* co-star Kevin Spacey, who was found not guilty of sexually assaulting four men two years ago. "I don't really think we need to talk about Kevin," she says. "That was then."

Now Wright, who is best known for her portrayal of Claire Underwood, the remorseless Washington schemer in *House of Cards*, is back scheming in *The Girlfriend*. She plays Laura, an overly protective mother who battles with her son's new social-climbing girlfriend and could do with her own psilocybin trip to sever umbilical ties. It's full of sex, plot twists and property porn. For those who relish watching the unspooling lives of the super-rich, it is highly bingeable. "It's about two women fighting over the same love," says Wright, who also directed the first three episodes. "It's a tug-of-war."

Penn was the tougher parent. "But he was gone so much. He'd come back and be the policeman, and leave me with the residue"

Top left: with Tom Hanks in Forrest Gump, 1994. Top right: in her second film, The Princess Bride, with Cary Elwes, 1987. Above: with Laurie Davidson, as her son, in the new Prime Video series The Girlfriend

Wright has also been the real-life mother who has to meet her children's new partners. "I felt like that with a couple of girls my son brought home, where I was, like, 'No, this is not going to work.' And it didn't work, thank God," she says. "You're always going to have that intrinsic mummy radar." Hopper, an actor and model, has spoken about struggling with an addiction to crystal meth and being put into rehab by his father. "Every day if the phone rings you're, like, 'Is he alive? Is she alive?'" Wright recalls. "I went through that for so many years with both of them."

Was Dylan, who is also an actress, rebellious too? "Oh yeah," she says, letting out an almighty sigh. "But they're both in a really good place right now."

It can't have been easy being the offspring of two Hollywood stars. After meeting on the set of *State of Grace* in 1990 and having an on-off relationship, Penn and Wright married in 1996. Both had been married before: Penn to Madonna and Wright to Dane Witherspoon, her co-star in *Santa* ➤

PREVIOUS PAGES: SANE SEVEN FOR THE SUNDAY TIMES MAGAZINE. MAKE-UP: TALIA SPARROW. THESE PAGES: ALAMY, PLANET PHOTOS

Barbara, a long-forgotten Eighties soap. The Wright-Penn wedding sounds as though it was playboy-heavy: Jack Nicholson had his trousers pulled down by Marlon Brando while he was making a speech and Warren Beatty read a passage from the poet Rainer Maria Rilke.

Escaping the media glare and Hollywood circus, the It couple moved to Ross, a small town north of San Francisco. Wright stepped back from acting to prioritise her family, declining big roles such as Maid Marian in *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* (Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio was cast instead). She still believes this was the right decision but there are things she would have done differently. "I have a huge regret as a mother and have experienced the fallout of this regret for many years with my kids — I wasn't hard enough on them."

Penn, now 65, who won Oscars for *Mystic River* in 2003 and *Milk* in 2008, was the tougher parent. "But he was gone so much of the time. He'd come back and be the policeman and then he'd leave me with the residue," Wright recalls. "Then I would soften the blow. We were both extremes. They didn't get that grey area in the middle, which is stern, and that is what they needed."

"I love being in this country — people are so kind. America is a shitshow. Everything's rush, competition and speed"

The couple separated in 2007, got back together for a while and finally divorced in 2010. Years later, they became friends again.

Wright is a child of divorce. She grew up in San Diego with her mother, Gayle Gaston, a sales director for a cosmetics business, and older brother, Richard. Holidays were spent in Dallas, Texas, with her father, Freddie Wright, an executive at a pharmaceuticals company whom she describes as "a sweetpea". Before she hit her teens, her mother had remarried and she gained a British stepfather, Andy Carmichael, from Cheshire. He and Gayle are no longer together, but his daughter Lucinda — Wright's stepsister — works with Wright and is pottering around the house while we talk. "I'm her support human," Lucinda says.

At a roller-disco aged 14, Wright was scouted to be a model. There were jobs advertising Capri-Sun, Maybelline mascara and L'Oréal. Of course the modelling industry in the early Eighties was not always a place of respectful treatment and safeguarding, especially for teenagers and young women.

"Scarred me for life," Wright says. She recalls lining up with a handful of other girls for a modelling job with a big-name photographer. They all had to take off their shirts. Wright was rejected because her breasts were too small. "Immediately you're shameful. I will never show my breasts," she says, recalling her mindset then. "It becomes a thing."

Encouraged by an agent, she tried acting and quickly found success and fame with Rob Reiner's 1987 cult fantasy *The Princess Bride*, and playing Jenny, the heartbreaker who dies of an Aids-related

Below: with her daughter, Dylan, and son, Hopper, in 2013. Below right: with their father, Sean Penn, in 2004

illness opposite Tom Hanks in *Forrest Gump* (1994). After that, inevitably she was typecast: "Everybody wanted me to play the pained, stoic woman. It took a long while to get out of that rut."

Fast forward to 2013 when the director David Fincher persuaded Wright, who was then in her mid-forties and reluctant to play a "wife of", to appear as Kevin Spacey's spouse in the American remake of the political drama series *House of Cards*. Oh how deliciously ruthless Claire Underwood was; Wright grins at the memory of fans being scared of her while also asking for selfies. ("I am willing to let your child wither and die inside you if that is what's required," Claire tells a pregnant underling in one scene. "Now tell me, am I really the kind of enemy you want to make?")

Behind the scenes Wright fought to be paid the same as Spacey, who played the Democrat politician Frank Underwood, but was allegedly told that he was paid more than her because he was an Oscar winner. Only by taking on extra roles as a director and an executive producer on the show could she command the same fee as him (reportedly $500,000 an episode). "If we're doing the same job, because that's key, why wouldn't we be paid the same amount?" Wright says. "Whether you're an astronaut, doctor, actor, journalist, it's about equality." By the sixth and final series in 2018, Spacey had been roundly cancelled by Hollywood and was cut out of the show, while Claire Underwood was elected president. We avoid discussing real-life politics, though Wright says she is very happy to be here and not across the Atlantic. "America is a shitshow," she says.

Above: with her partner, Henry Smith, at the Monte-Carlo Television Festival this month. Below: in her modelling days

For the past few years she has been largely working in the UK, renting a succession of homes in the Chilterns where she and her stepsister spend weekends. Half of Hollywood, it seems, is currently down the road in the Cotswolds. "I love being in this country. There's a freedom of self here. People are so kind," she says. "They're living. They're not in the car in traffic, panicked on a phone call, eating a sandwich. That's most of America. Everything's rush, competition and speed."

In the Chilterns she listens to the birds in the morning, whereas in Los Angeles, where she owns a home near the ocean, she wakes to the sound of her neighbours' home renovations. "Everyone's building a huge house and I'm just done with all that — I love the quiet. And I've met my person. Finally." Aha, no wonder Wright seems so relaxed: she is head over heels.

Finding Mr Wright has taken time. After Penn, Wright was twice engaged to Ben Foster, an American actor 14 years her junior, but they never married. In 2018 she did walk down the aisle with Clément Giraudet, a French fashion executive 18 years her junior. In 2022 she filed for divorce citing "irreconcilable differences".

Then came Henry Smith, a British-born, Australian-raised architect, whom she met in the very English setting of a country pub. Rusty the labrador was nosing around Wright's seat; she asked the man sitting behind her if she could feed his dog some of her steak. "He goes, 'No, it's not my dog, it's his dog,'" she says, leaping off the sofa to act out the scene, pointing across the room. "And Henry was standing at the bar, 6ft 2in, and he put his pint down, came over to me and grabbed my shoulders. He goes, 'Who the f*** are you?' And I said, 'Who the f*** are *you*?' And that was it."

In the retelling this sounds rather aggressive, but she clarifies that Smith, 52, just didn't know who Wright was and was struck by her Nordic goddess beauty. "He is a sweetheart and just a good, decent adult. He's a man," she says, in what may or may not be a dig at previous, younger partners.

This extraordinary meet-cute happened almost a year ago. Not long afterwards they were both struck down with Covid. ➤

BACKGRID, ALAMY, GETTY IMAGES

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Wright talks about suffering with brain fog for five months and still struggles with extreme fatigue. "Getting to know each other in deep long Covid was like… what's that called at the airport? The fast track. We did a fast-track getting to know you because we were lying in bed deathly ill, crying, laughing, hugging, loving, snogging, f***ing," she says. "Just like, 'I want to know you.'" She is clearly romantic, I say. "You have to be a sensualist and tactile or I'm out." Would she marry again? "No. God no. Why? That's just unnecessary."

Wright is spiritual and muses that she may have manifested Henry into her life. "That's exactly what I wanted. I'm turning 60 and I'm, like, 'Is this it?'" she says. "I love being alone and I've done that many times. But I'm, like, I want to grow old with somebody, and travel and see the world."

The couple's plan is to take some time off work, move to a rented home at the English seaside with Rusty and Rocky, the puppy they bought together, and simply enjoy life. "It's liberating to be done," she says, grinning. "Be done with searching, looking and getting 60 per cent of what you wanted."

Wright photographed at home this month for The Sunday Times Magazine

It is clear that Wright feels at home in the UK and has absorbed British sensibilities and swearwords. She casually drops the c-word in a way most Americans wouldn't. Though she is still navigating our obsession with class. "It's very evident when you're in a room and you feel the judgment or the praise of someone who's more elevated," she says. "I'm trying to figure it out. Why are you guys so obsessed with who went to this boarding school or this university? Who gives a shit?"

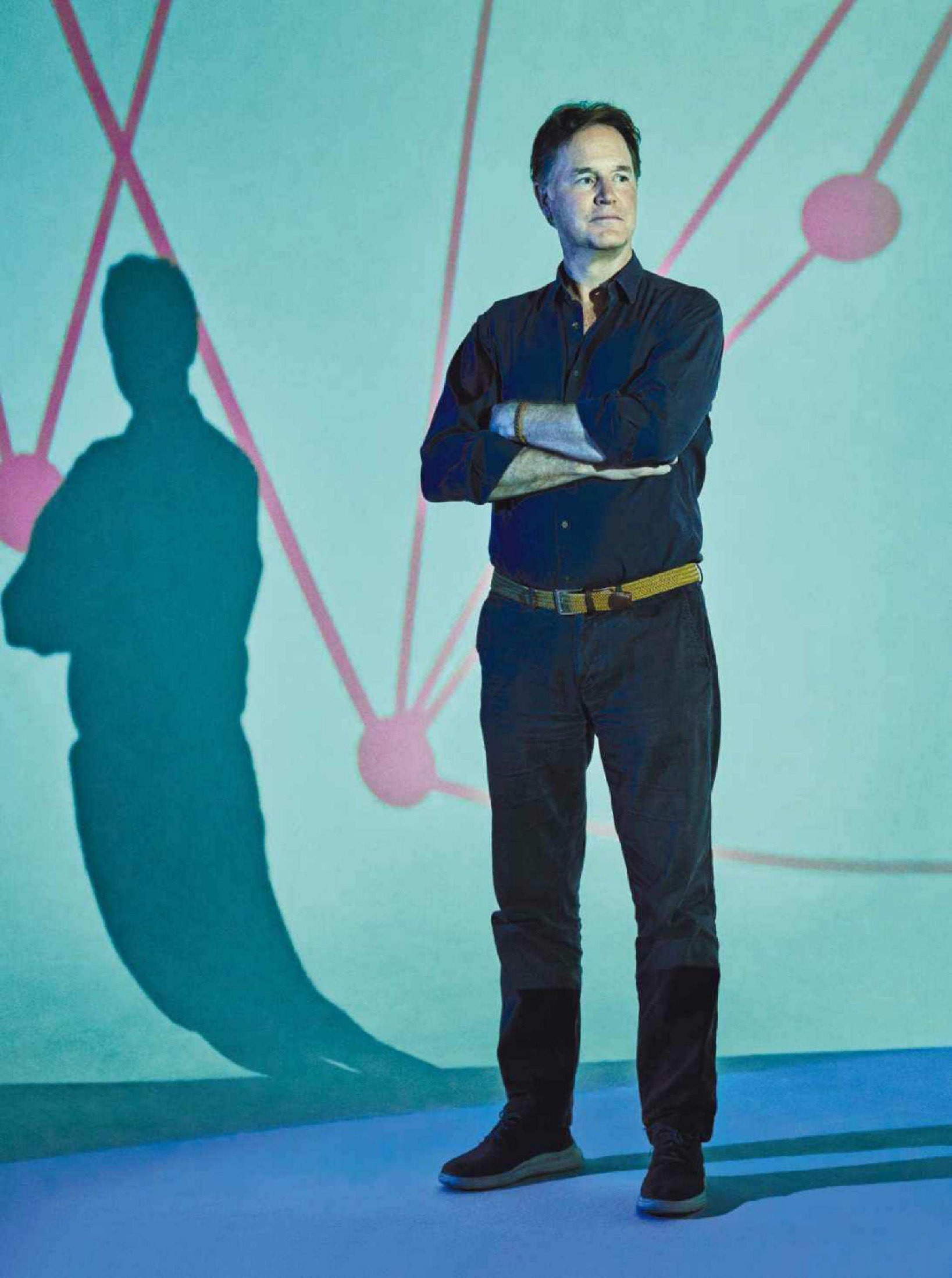
Since *House of Cards* she has focused on directing, including episodes of the Netflix drug-lords drama *Ozark* and her first film, *Land*, about a grieving woman, played by Wright, living in the Wyoming wilderness. In her acting she has avoided roles with heavy Claire Underwood flavourings. "They want to cast this soldier, this frightening venal woman who will bite your head off if you turn the wrong cheek," she says of the typecasting. Has directing made her a better actor? "No, I'm not a good actor. You look at somebody like a Daniel Day-Lewis or a Tilda Swinton," she says. "Just the variety they have. There's a thing in them where they have no fear."

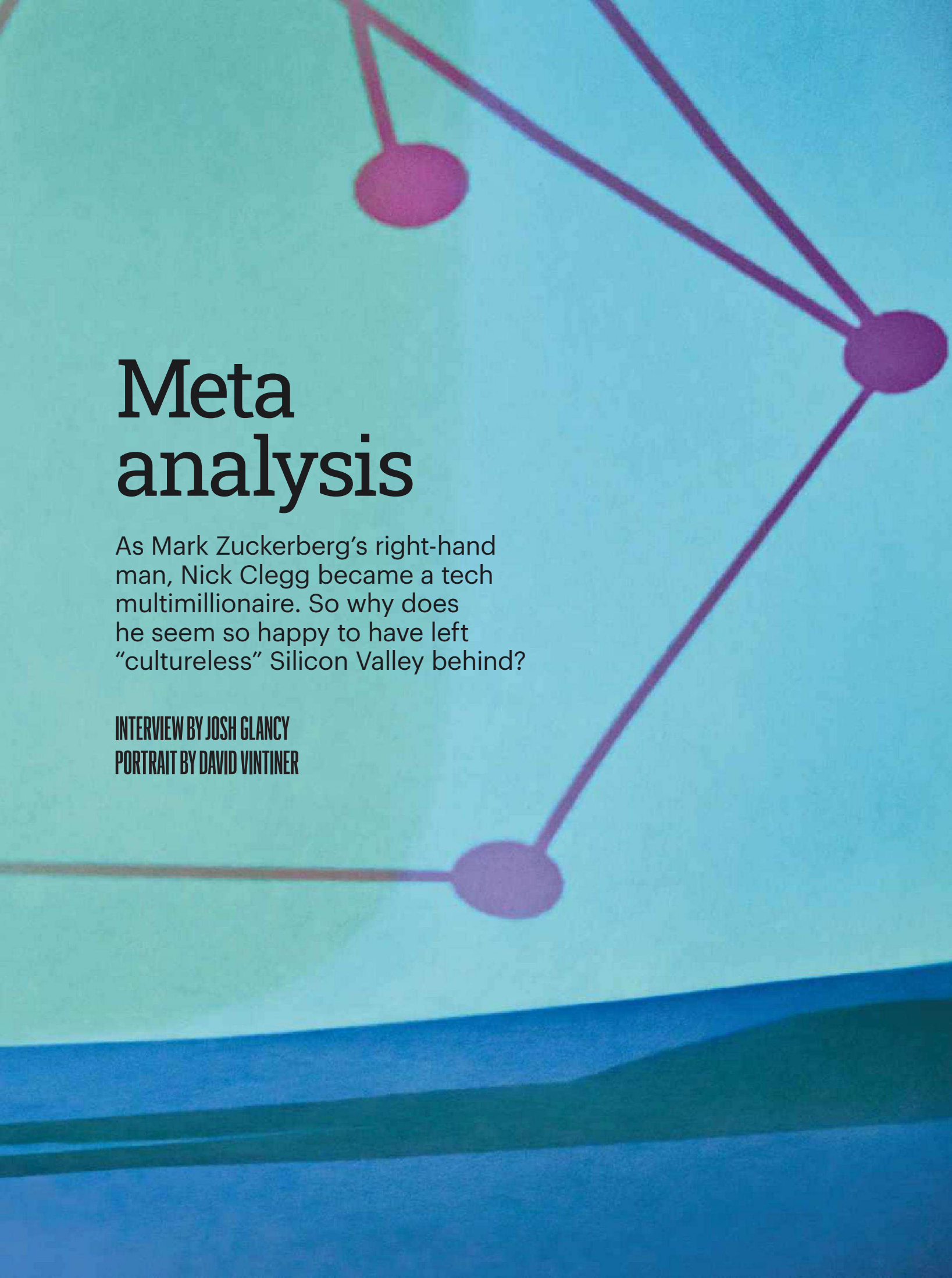
Nevertheless, her fifties, she says, have been a decade free of trepidation. "Some people may not like you because you speak in this direct tone. I'm not a yeller — I'm just direct and I'm very frank," she says. "When you're producing and directing and acting in a show, you're the leader." For men, such a working style is generally acceptable. How are direct women viewed in comparison? "She's a hysterical bitch. Or crazy — I hear that a lot. 'Did you hear her on the conference call? She was crazy,'" Wright says, mimicking an over-exercised man. "You call that crazy?"

On the horizon, though, there are fewer conference calls and more coastal walks with Rusty, Rocky and her man. "I'm seen and loved for who I am," Wright says. "It's so relaxing." ■

All six episodes of *The Girlfriend* are available on Prime Video from Wednesday, September 10

SANE SEVEN FOR THE SUNDAY TIMES MAGAZINE. MAKE-UP: TALIA SPARROW





Meta analysis

As Mark Zuckerberg's right-hand man, Nick Clegg became a tech multimillionaire. So why does he seem so happy to have left "cultureless" Silicon Valley behind?

INTERVIEW BY JOSH GLANCY
PORTRAIT BY DAVID VINTINER

pending an afternoon with Nick Clegg is like slipping back in time to 2010. Everything seems calmer, more rational. Conversation is measured. The sensible middle ground is diligently occupied. Reliable chaps with good backhands and long pedigrees are getting on with the business of running the country.

The temperature seems somehow lower with Nick in the room. Not actually lower of course, because it's early August, Britain's fourth summer heatwave is under way and we're in what you'd have to call the chill-out zone of a photography studio in Parsons Green, west London. Our former deputy prime minister arrives, slightly overheated, having chugged up the road from Putney on an e-bike. He removes his helmet and shows me its snazzy lights. "How centrist dad is that?"

A bouncy 58, wearing a casual navy shirt and slacks, Clegg is still very recognisably the man who briefly seduced Britain during its bout of Cleggmania and then became a (pick your metaphor) punching bag/lightning rod/sacrificial lamb for unpopular decisions made by David Cameron's coalition government. He is still charming and impeccably briefed; referencing a recent article of mine and highlighting a mutual friend. This is flagrant schmooze but it works anyway, because most people don't bother.

To be honest, I'm impressed that Clegg still cycles around in 30C heat, given reports that he made more than £100 million from his time in charge of global affairs at Meta, along with a £3.6 million profit from selling his Californian mansion Were those accurate, I wonder.

"I do not have £100 million in my bank," he says. "You're largely paid in stock and I was in Silicon Valley at a time when the valuation of these companies just kept going up and up and up. So I've been paid extremely well. It's obviously been enormous, you know — I've benefited from that enormously. I'm not paid a penny from a taxpayer, I'm not public property, so I don't feel the need to provide a running commentary. I'm incredibly lucky to have been paid very, very well indeed and I'm not going to pretend otherwise."

Above: Clegg's first joint press conference with coalition partner David Cameron in the garden of No 10, May 12, 2010. Below: with Conservative colleagues Cameron, Philip Hammond and William Hague, 2012

I ask about remuneration, not just because I'm nosy — though of course I absolutely am — but because it gets to the central question of his glittering career, the one that historians will ponder as and when he turns up in the archives: is Nick Clegg just a power-hungry hypocrite? Or a decent liberal doing his best in a difficult world?

Clegg's job at Meta represented a convenient and very cushy landing spot for a bruised and beaten politician. It was a chance to escape "that awful penumbra of British politics: the House of Lords, sitting on a few boards, writing books that no one bothers to read". But did he actually make a lasting impact at the company, or was he only there to provide a liberal gloss for Mark Zuckerberg's megalomania? A parallel question might be asked of his time in the coalition. Did he really push Cameron's government in a significantly better

direction, or just enjoy the trappings of power before leading his party off an electoral cliff?

"Mark is not a politician"

It is Silicon Valley that we're here to talk about. In the British imagination, Nick Clegg will always, first and foremost, be announcing the coalition in the garden of Downing Street with his new pal Dave; or perhaps apologising mournfully for breaking his electoral promise and raising tuition fees, a crime for which he was burnt in effigy by student protesters. But he has spent the past seven years at Zuckerberg's right hand, helping to run one of the world's most powerful, most profitable and most despised companies.

Keen to apply this newly acquired knowledge, Clegg has written a book called *How to Save the Internet*, which is a manifesto for preventing the web from becoming balkanised by country and region and collapsing into a morass of AI slop.

He's free to do this because in January Clegg left Meta and its generous stock options behind, announcing that he would step down as the company's president of global affairs to be replaced by fellow Meta executive Joel Kaplan. So why did he leave?

At the time, Donald Trump was steaming back into the White House having threatened to arrest Zuckerberg for "election fraud". Operation kiss the ring was in full flow, which made Kaplan's deep connections with the Republican Party paramount. Clegg wanted nothing to do with it — and wouldn't have been much use if he had. "It was a natural, obvious time for me to leave," he says. "When it became obvious that there was going to be this very big pivot, not just on Meta's part but on Silicon Valley's part, I just thought it didn't really appeal to me; it didn't appeal to my swim lane. To put it mildly, it's not my bag."

This EU-loving arch-cosmopolitan would have made an easy target for a vengeful Maga. After 2021's January 6 riot, it was Clegg who reportedly urged Zuckerberg to ban Trump from Facebook. "I defer to you, Nick," was the chief executive's reported response, which conveniently made Clegg the frontman for the ban. "I had baggage because of the decisions I'd taken," he says.

The decision to leave was a product of "endless discussions" between Clegg and Zuckerberg that took place over emails and on WhatsApp. "It's totally civilised," Clegg says. "I mean, it's like, he runs the company, it's his company."

"I'm incredibly lucky to have been paid very, very well indeed and I'm not going to pretend otherwise"

Above: in Dublin with the Meta CEO, Mark Zuckerberg, after meeting politicians to discuss harmful content in 2019. Below: losing his Sheffield Hallam seat to Labour's Jared O'Mara at the 2017 general election

Clegg was originally hired by Zuckerberg and his No 2, Sheryl Sandberg, in 2018 because Facebook, which later became Meta, had become a political battlefield. It was blamed for the first election of Trump and roasted over the Cambridge Analytica scandal, in which the personal data of millions of Facebook users was collected by the British consulting firm for political advertising. A wave of regulation loomed in Washington and Brussels.

Clegg was there to smooth things over and depoliticise the company again. "It worked very well," he says, "as long as the strategy which I was able to set, obviously with Mark Zuckerberg's consent, was something I could get on with."

But then, after Trump's re-election, Zuckerberg "decided to sail right back into the political maelstrom". One of the defining images of the second Trump term so far is the colossi of big tech — Zuckerberg, Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos, Tim "Apple" Cook — all attending the inauguration in January and bending the knee to the returning emperor. Clegg thinks this was a mistake.

Part of the reason he was attracted to Silicon Valley in the first place was its notable distance from politics, a legacy of its countercultural past. The absence of politicians appealed after his own brutal trifecta of Westminster defeats: in 2015, the Lib Dems were wiped out in the general election; in 2016 he was devastated by the Brexit result; and then in 2017 he lost his Sheffield Hallam seat to the 35-year-old Labour publican (and now convicted ➤

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fraudster) Jared O'Mara. But now Silicon Valley has embraced politics too.

"Mark is not a politician," he says. "He doesn't pretend to be a politician. So he will do whatever he thinks is best to secure the longevity and success of his company. [But] I have a rather old-fashioned liberal view that private sector innovation thrives best at some polite distance from politicians. I think it's better when Silicon Valley and DC keep each other at a wary distance. And I think they'll end up relearning that lesson."

Top: Mark Zuckerberg at Trump's second inauguration with other tech giants Jeff Bezos and Lauren Sánchez, Google's Sundar Pichai and Elon Musk. Above: Clegg sold his mansion in Atherton, California, for £10.3m

A hype bubble

What of Clegg's achievements at Meta? In the dizzying world of Trump 2.0, many of Clegg's well-intentioned reforms there seem almost quaint. He spent a considerable amount of time advocating for the company's third-party fact-checking system to combat misinformation, but Zuckerberg has now binned that. He established the "Oversight Board" as an independent body to oversee difficult content-moderation decisions, but Zuckerberg barely even bothered informing that board when he made that decision to dismantle fact-checking. Clegg booted Trump off the company's platforms, but now the president is back and spreading nonsense like a tumescent firehose.

So was it all just window-dressing? "I'm incredibly proud of the stuff I did at Facebook," Clegg says. "I made a huge number of changes. Whether it's building new institutions like the Oversight Board, divulging way more data, rebuilding relationships with governments, not just rejecting all new regulation out of hand. I think I made the world's largest social media platform way more accountable, transparent, responsive to users."

But will all those changes endure? "I can't talk for a company which has already changed dramatically since I left a few short months ago," he says. "That's the speed of change in Silicon Valley. I can only talk for the company in which I felt, you know, I was one of the prominent leaders of it."

In fact things have moved so fast in the Valley that Clegg's handsome pay package now also looks a bit quaint, amid reports that Zuckerberg has offered AI engineers salary packages of up to $1 billion. Clegg's view on the great AI question — how big is it really? — is rather more sanguine.

"This is very, very powerful technology," he says. "It's going to transform health diagnostics, traffic planning. But I certainly think it's a hype bubble. I mean, we just had [Chat] GPT-5. There are lots of great improvements, but it's not a paradigm shift. So we don't yet know the answer. I would just urge everybody to slightly zone out from the hype."

I can't quite tell if Clegg actually likes Zuckerberg. Does he admire him? "He is one of the most… his persistence, his remorselessness is really quite extraordinary. I mean, whether you like or loathe him, he will go down in history as one of the defining figures of our times. In terms of sheer competitive energy he is quite exceptional. Highly, highly driven." No criticisms then? "Come on, I'm not going to work at it for seven years and then come out and say… I'm not. What's the point?"

Have the pair stayed in touch since he left Meta? "Yeah. I mean, I haven't been in touch with him much over the past few months. But I'm sure I'll be in touch with him."

I'm similarly curious as to whether Clegg actually enjoyed his time in northern California. His wife, Miriam González Durántez, a 57-year-old lawyer and vice-chairwoman of UBS Europe, didn't exactly fall in love with the place, something she has been forthright about. "She generally is," Clegg says with a grin. He has enthused about the hiking and the scenery, spending time in the wilderness with their three boys, Antonio, 23, Alberto, 21, and Miguel, 16. But how did he find the culture?

"I couldn't find culture. It is an oddly cultureless place. You speak to any of these people in the tech companies, all these pseudo-intellectuals in the VC [venture capital] industry, and they parade themselves as great consensus breakers. And yet everyone wears the same clothes, drives the same cars, listens to the same podcasts, repeats the same fads that they picked up in the same book that everyone recommends to each other. It's the most odd thing that a place that is mould-breaking is so insufferably conformist."

Clegg was mostly busy working. Was it harder for Miriam then? "It always is."

Yet however weird and incestuous life in Palo Alto could be, learning mixed martial arts with Mark and Sheryl and so forth, he says he found SW1 worse. Since graduating from the University of Cambridge in 1989, Clegg says he has worked in three "bubbles". He spent more than a decade in Brussels, first as a European Commission trade official and then as an MEP — he was elected in 1999, the same year as Nigel Farage. ➤

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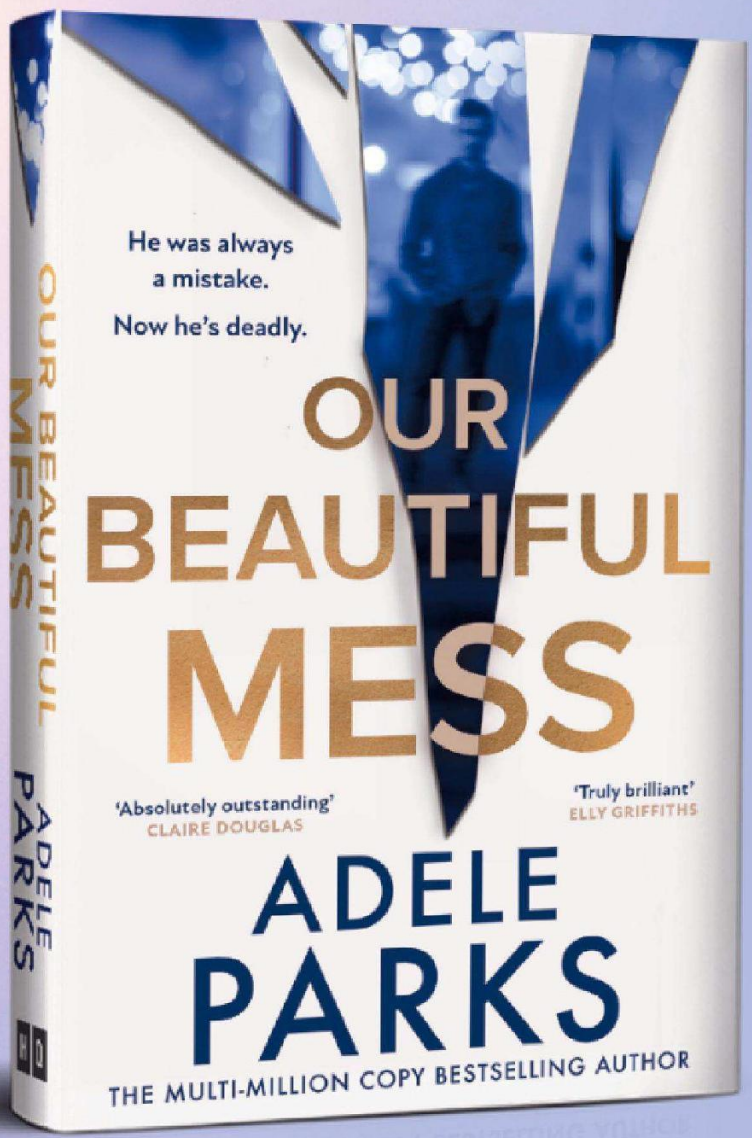

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He became the Lib Dem MP for Sheffield Hallam at the 2005 election, was elevated to lead his party just two years later and then became deputy prime minister in 2010, serving for five years.

"All three bubbles have very similar features, which is immense self-regard," he says. "Of the three, I probably found Westminster the most insufferable bubble, the most introverted one. Partly because the hammer-beamed, faded, asbestos-riddled glory of Westminster felt so out of keeping with the relative decline of the country in which it was situated."

Life after Meta

But for all Clegg's Westminster ennui ("Must we?" he groans when I suggest moving the conversation on to politics), he clearly misses life in the arena. "Once you've been in politics, it courses in your veins always," he admits.

He still has that deep political urge to fight his corner and savage his opponents. What, I can't resist asking, does he think is the biggest benefit of Brexit? "I don't think there is a best thing," he says. "It's totally self-harming." What about getting a slightly better trade deal with America than the EU? "You think the difference of 5 per cent on tariffs with the US makes up for the catastrophic macroeconomic loss? The fact that the Brexiteers are scraping the barrel and somehow claiming… what? That we did all this for the past ten years for *that* success? Oh, whoopee. It's absurd."

He defends his role in the coalition government with undimmed ferocity. "The coalition was an amazing government," he says. "We did extraordinary things in incredibly difficult circumstances. We made it work for five years — no one thought we would. We recovered way more quickly from the damage of 2008 than anyone expected. We introduced sweeping reforms, [legalised] same-sex marriage, the biggest expansion of renewable energy ever, the triple lock guarantee, whether you agree with that now or not." (Personally, I'm not sure saddling Britain with this increasingly unaffordable pensioner bung really belongs on the greatest hits list.)

When Clegg was in the coalition, the Labour opposition often excoriated him for going along with Tory austerity. Now the shoe is on the other foot, is there perhaps a grim vindication in seeing them flounder fiscally? "The Labour Party has indulged in such double standards about fiscal policy for the past decade, they have no margin of manoeuvre," he says. "I don't take any pleasure in this — I genuinely wish Keir Starmer and Rachel Reeves well. I just wish the left would from time to time get off its moral high horse and accept there are certain laws of economic gravity."

In the Royal Box at Wimbledon in July with his wife, the lawyer Miriam González Durántez, and celebrity guests including Benedict Cumberbatch

He thinks the election of Trump, who has upended global trade, was the moment to announce a major shift in economic policy and make overdue funding cuts. "Instead they said, in this slightly technocratic nasal tone, 'The world's changed, but we're not going to change at all with it.' There's a lack of political guile and leadership."

So what now for Clegg? He is making some investments and plans to use his rare combination of top-level experience in politics and tech to boost Europe's start-up economy: "We've now got more tech start-ups in Europe than even in the US. What we just don't have is an ability to scale them. Scale, or the lack of scale, is our curse."

How will he want history to remember him? "Firstly, history's not done, I'm 58," he says. But he wants to be seen as a man who was "never frightened" of getting his hands dirty. "Never frightened of trying to reform things… and doing it squarely within my British liberal values — fairness, openness, transparency. I've never understood the bent head, the cowed head. Much better to get your hands dirty for good ends."

I find this argument quite compelling, much as I find him quite compelling. But unfortunately for Clegg, the world seems to keep moving away from him. The institutions he tried to reform — Westminster, Meta — have, to a greater or lesser degree, ended up spitting him out and shying away from his pragmatic liberalism. Even his theory for saving the internet, proposed in his new book, involves America making complicated multilateral treaties with India and Europe to keep the web open and free. Which is exactly the kind of thing that America is doing less. But Clegg is convinced that there will be a rethink of this, post-Trump, because there's a "naked self-interest in the US relearning the patterns of partnership".

Perhaps in time the arc of politics will bend Clegg's way once more. Perhaps he'll be vindicated. Or maybe he'll be looked back on as a very successful failure, a moth who flew close to power and put his many talents to dubious ends. Either way, he'll have to make his peace with it all. "I really hate the way that people describe and misdescribe what I did here, there and everywhere," he says. "[But] I've learnt the brutal lesson in politics, which is that the defeated don't write history. The victors write history. I had to very self-consciously say, 'I've just got to let that go.'"

Perhaps this, ultimately, is the true meaning of what it is to be a Lib Dem ■

"In Silicon Valley everyone wears the same clothes, drives the same cars, listens to the same podcasts"

***How to Save the Internet* by Nick Clegg (Bodley Head £25) is out on Thursday. To order a copy go to timesbookshop.co.uk. Discount available for Times+ members**

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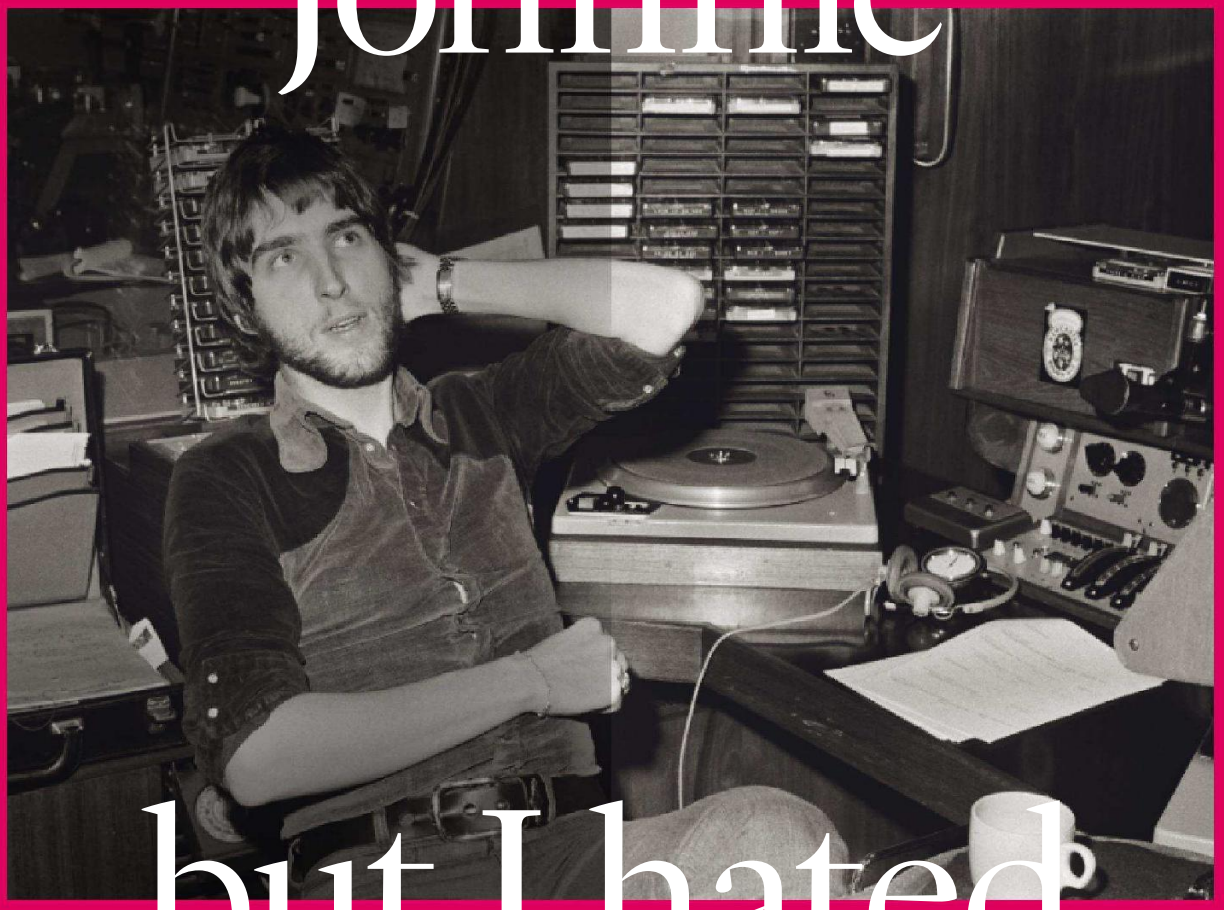
I loved Johnnie but I hated being his carer



Being married to the BBC disc jockey Johnnie Walker wasn't easy for his wife, Tiggy. Then came the job of nursing him through his final years

INTERVIEW BY JULIA LLEWELLYN SMITH PORTRAIT BY CELIE NIGOUMI

LAST

August, four months before Johnnie Walker died on New Year's Eve, aged 79, he told his wife, Tiggy, he wanted to throw a JohnnieFest — a farewell kitchen disco for friends at their home in Shaftesbury, Dorset.

The veteran DJ's terminal lung condition was getting worse fast. He was in a wheelchair, on oxygen and sleeping much of the day. "It was insane. I said, 'Are you sure?' But he wanted to see people dance to his music and feel alive again one last time. So I invited 50 friends and hung up the fairy lights," Tiggy, 64, recalls. "It nearly killed me but it was a fantastic night. Johnnie was so funny. He gave a speech with his cannula in and said, 'Excuse this, it's my intravenous cocaine.' He was annoyed when people wanted to talk to him. He just wanted to DJ. After his last song, *The Rose* by Bette Midler, he just turned and wheeled away into his bedroom, with his hand raised as if to say goodbye.

"I put him to bed. His heart rate was so high, I was very scared the party had killed him, although that wouldn't have been so bad, because he'd have ended things just as he wanted. The next morning I waited until the guests staying had left, because I didn't want to find him dead with anyone in the house. When I eventually went in he was like, 'Where were you?'"

Johnnie, whose career began on the pirate stations Swinging Radio England and Radio Caroline before he moved to Radio 1 in 1969, where he was among the first to play Steve Harley, Fleetwood Mac, Lou Reed and the Eagles, was married to Tiggy, his third wife, for 22 years. From the start the relationship was tempestuous, with the couple weathering infidelity, a cancelled wedding, both partners' cancers and an unproven allegation of sexual assault.

Then, in 2019 Johnnie was diagnosed with idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis, a disease that inflames and scars the lungs, increasingly impeding breathing. His prognosis was two to five years. In the end, he survived five years and four months. Tiggy became his carer. It was a role she hated.

"People will say I'm a total bitch but the worst thing was not knowing how long it was going to go on for. Johnnie had a terrible habit of taking my hand and telling me he only had three weeks left, but actually he was like the Duracell bunny, indestructible, and I felt trapped. If you knew it was going to end on December 31, you could work towards that and plan a holiday for afterwards, but you didn't know. I was always in a state of high alert, not knowing how bad it was going to get and how it would finish, because he was so frightened of dying fighting for breath. The nerves were exhausting."

FIVE WEEKS BEFORE THEIR WEDDING, JOHNNIE TOLD HER HE COULDN'T GO THROUGH WITH IT. HE STILL CAME ON THE HONEYMOON

Above: Tiggy and Johnnie Walker on their wedding day, 2002. Previous pages: Tiggy earlier this month, in front of a portrait of her late husband; Johnnie Walker in 1971, by then a DJ at Radio 1

Now, nine months after his death, she is publishing *Both Sides Now*, a startlingly honest memoir of their rollercoaster relationship. "Ultimately it was a love story, but there certainly were challenges," she says. "Our journey wasn't an easy one."

That's an understatement. I say I can't decide if the book is the worst advertisement for marriage or — given she stuck it out so devotedly — the best. Tiggy roars with laughter. "Someone recently asked me, was I glad I married Johnnie. I am now I've come out the other side, but it was a heck of a journey. But I believe our two souls had made a pact and so I kept forgiving him… Our first five years together were bloody awful. I don't know why I stayed. But over the years we grew closer and closer and there was so much understanding and trust."

Most of the book was written during Johnnie's last months, after arduous days spent pushing his wheelchair, changing commodes, bathing and dressing him and trying to get him to eat, while witnessing him become withdrawn. "It became the greatest catharsis. When it had been a really difficult day, I'd tuck Johnnie up and get into

bed with my laptop and vent. So it's very raw and real." Johnnie, meanwhile, wrote the book's prologue from his sick bed. "He also recorded it for the audiobook. That's going to be spooky for people hearing it."

We're sitting in Tiggy's tiny, tasteful pied-à-terre in Primrose Hill, north London. She's sharp and vivacious, often laughing endearingly at how much leeway she gave her irrepressible husband and her new-agey beliefs ("Johnny was Aries, I'm Capricorn — terrible combination!"), before dissolving in tears. "I didn't cry for six months after he died because, writing the book, it was almost as if he was still with me. Then I handed the book in and the tears started, because it was as if he'd now gone up and left me."

Tiggy met Johnnie in 2001, at the Union members' club in Soho, when she was producing television ads for the likes of Volvo, VW, McDonald's, Lenor and Grolsch. He was presenting Radio 2's *Drivetime*, then the nation's most popular drivetime show. "The connection was instant and total. But if I'd known what life was going to be like with him I'd have run."

The daughter of a director of the pharmaceutical company Eli Lilly, from Hampshire, she was 40, divorced with no children. After Bristol University she had founded, then sold, her own ad-production company and was now working for Blink Productions, enjoying "a stable, successful life, earning more than Johnnie ever did". In contrast, he was "a handful, a rock'n'roller who loved to break rules". He had been married before, once to Frances Kum, with whom he had two children, Sam and Beth, both adults when Tiggy met him, and for six months in 1992 to Alison McDowall.

From Solihull, this son of a salesman, who said he deliberately failed his O-levels because he didn't want a piece of paper determining his path in life, started his career as a car salesman while moonlighting as a dance hall DJ, before joining pirate radio, then Radio 1. He became embroiled in the BBC payola scandal in the early 1970s, as one of a number of DJs and producers who attended orgies involving BBC staff and prostitutes allegedly organised by record companies as an inducement to play particular singles. Although he was never charged with any criminal offence, he admitted taking part in sex sessions and was referred to in court as "Mr T" when one prostitute gave evidence at a 1974 Old Bailey trial. When he met Tiggy, he was not long out of rehab for drugs and alcohol. He had gone there after Radio 2 suspended him in 1999; he had been secretly filmed by the News of the World's "fake sheikh", Mazher Mahmood, chopping out lines of cocaine. He also had £40,000 in legal debts.

"Diametric opposites", they nonetheless fell passionately in love. "From the start Johnnie was saying, 'I want to spend the rest of my life with you.'" But just three months into their relationship, he admitted to a one-night stand with an ex-girlfriend. The shock, Tiggy believes, caused her to go immediately into menopause. "I'd always assumed I'd have four children. That was taken away from me, although now I'm relieved I don't have to worry about the feelings of a child who's lost their father."

They split, yet within weeks she took him back. "I was so hook, line and sinker in love," she says, shrugging. Shortly afterwards, he proposed. Tiggy booked the Larmer Tree Gardens in Salisbury for the wedding, bought a Salvatore Ferragamo top and trousers to wear ("the most expensive outfit I'd ever purchased") and sent out invitations.

Then, five weeks before the wedding, Johnnie, who had just visited the same ex for the weekend, told her he couldn't go through with it. Tiggy had to uninvite guests who were flying in from all over the world. "The humiliation. The indignity. The heartache. And all exacerbated by the fact he was famous. I never wore that outfit and the scar of that day never completely healed."

She went on their Mallorcan honeymoon alone, only to have Johnnie announce he was joining her. "What a f***ing cheek!" she screams. Yet of course she relented. A few months later they married, with only a handful of guests. "I remember making those sickness and health vows. I had no idea how I'd be tested on them immediately."

On honeymoon in India, Johnnie fell ill with what turned out to be non-Hodgkin's lymphoma of the colon. "Johnnie had the diagnosis but I fell apart. We'd gone through so much turmoil to marry, only for him then to die." She stopped working to care for him, holding his hand during chemo, mopping up vomit, enduring mood swings. He returned to work at Radio 2 a year after his diagnosis and Tiggy returned to her job — "but Johnnie couldn't handle it. He hated people calling at 9pm. So somehow I let my great career go." She ended up managing him for 17 years. "That became my mission; I poured my life and soul into it. I wouldn't advise anyone to do what I did, but when I told my wise dad how much I missed my career and making my own money, he'd ➤

Left: the BBC DJs, from left, Emperor Rosko, Alan Freeman, Annie Nightingale and Johnnie Walker in 1976. Above: Walker with Elton John at a radio awards ceremony, 2004

PREVIOUS PAGES: CELIE NIGOUMI FOR THE SUNDAY TIMES MAGAZINE. HAIR AND MAKE-UP: KIRSTEN SARE. GETTY IMAGES. THESE PAGES: GETTY IMAGES. COURTESY OF TIGGY WALKER

say, 'Behind every great man is an even greater woman. Johnnie entertains millions of people, and you're helping him.'"

Her loyalty was ferocious, and she was livid when in 2006 he was shunted from *Drivetime* to the Sunday afternoon slot. Chris Evans replaced him. "Johnnie's nemesis! I won't be talking about the book on Chris's show; he's frightened of me."

In 2013 she was devastated to learn an anonymous woman had gone to the police, accusing Johnnie of sexually assaulting her backstage after a gig in the 1970s. The BBC initially said he would be taken off air but relented. The woman's description of her abuser was completely different from Johnnie's appearance. He was never charged yet had to wait four months for the CPS to drop the case. "It was horrific, like having a sword of Damocles over our heads. Johnnie wasn't worried because he knew it hadn't happened, but that didn't mean justice would out. I foresaw our whole lives being pulled from under our feet. What I couldn't bear, above all, was Johnnie's reputation being trashed, all those years of fantastic radio work being undone by somebody making false accusations."

She is convinced that the fact she couldn't discuss the allegations with anybody at the time, instead suppressing her angst, was the trigger for a stage 3 cancerous tumour in her breast, which was discovered shortly afterwards. "For me that was the greatest cost of life in the world of fame."

The couple had mingled backstage with the likes of Bruce Springsteen, Bonnie Raitt, James Taylor, Christine McVie, Roger Daltrey, David Bowie ("a man so visionary I question whether he was man or alien") and Sir Elton John. Yet as a plus-one Tiggy wasn't always made welcome. "At an Elton John tribute, I told Sharon Osbourne she looked lovely and she looked me up and down like a piece of shit, her face saying, 'How dare you address me directly?' I realised quickly famous people feel comfortable with other famous people and I was coming from outside and not part of the gang."

"PEOPLE WILL SAY I'M A TOTAL BITCH BUT IT WAS HARD NOT KNOWING HOW LONG IT WAS GOING TO GO ON FOR. HE WAS LIKE THE DURACELL BUNNY"

Johnnie in the studio with the traffic news reporter Sally Boazman, aka Sally Traffic, in 2023

When Tiggy's cancer struck, it was Johnnie's turn to nurse her through the operations, chemo and radiotherapy (though he never gave up work). After 18 months she received the all-clear, but four years later he was given his terminal diagnosis and their busy, sociable life abruptly ended. For Johnnie's final year, Tiggy cared for him round the clock. "It was definitely more challenging being the carer than having cancer."

There were moments of closeness when they shared a joke or watched box sets together, but much of the time he watched Formula 1 or read the hundreds of cards from adoring listeners, while Tiggy was dashing around clearing up his accidents, cooking meals he didn't have the energy to eat and feeling desperately lonely as his wheelchair prevented spontaneous human contact. "Once I just sat down in his room, collapsed, head in my hands. He said, 'Darling, I'm really worried about you. I think you might be ill.' He didn't get it."

Despite his weakening lungs and her allergy to cigarette smoke, he tested her constantly by continuing to smoke. "Over the years, several times I threw my wedding ring at him and disappeared for days because of his smoking. It was the one thing the doctors said he mustn't do. It was an insult to them, to me, to himself. Only when his palliative nurse said, 'Tiggy, Johnnie is an addict, and you cannot make an addict stop,' did I calm down."

They were buoyed by hundreds of letters from fans, while Ray Davies, Elton John and Peter Kay called to tell Johnnie how much he had meant to them. Until two months before his death, he recorded his Sunday *Sounds of the 70s* show, still attracting two million listeners a week, from home. "He'd change from this crumpled being in a wheelchair to being all, 'Hello! Johnnie Walker here!' Then afterwards he was an exhausted husk."

The couple were alone together when he died early in the morning on New Year's Eve. "I'm so proud he died at home," Tiggy says, her voice breaking. "In the circumstances, I gave him the best possible last year. He never went into a home." Led Zeppelin's Robert Plant, the Glastonbury founder Michael Eavis and a whole roster of Radio 2 DJs attended his funeral, where Rick Wakeman performed. His hearse was followed by seven Harley-Davidsons, accompanied by Bruce Springsteen's *Born to Run* at top volume.

Months on, Tiggy is still "exhausted, broken". Yet she's also excited at the prospect of reigniting her career and possibly meeting someone else, although this time she has no interest in another hell-raiser. "I really don't want to be in a situation again where I have to forgive somebody as many things as I had to forgive Johnnie. Now I want someone to look after me." ■

COURTESY OF TIGGY WALKER

Johnnie and Tiggy celebrating their 20th wedding anniversary in Cornwall, 2022

JOHNNIE ON TIGGY: "SHE CHOSE A TOUGH LIFE, MARRYING ME. SHE DESERVED SO MUCH MORE"

Well, I guess you could say I've been a wild one all right. A typical Aries. When I met Tiggy I'd recently left rehab, so I was as clean as a whistle. It was a bit of a con, really, because you never lose that wild streak. It's part of your DNA, your energy, your drive. For years I called Tiggy "a straight", which she was, not because she was dull — far from it; she lights up every room she enters — but because she was so sensible, with her feet firmly on the ground, unlike mine.

I guess something in me recognised that stability in her and I thought, I'll have some of that. I need some of that. Of course, I really fancied her too. Her laugh, her energy, her blue eyes, her curves… I've got a favourite record called *The Joker* by Steve Miller Band, which includes the lines "I really love your peaches/ Wanna shake your tree". And I did shake Tiggy's tree in more ways than one.

I credit myself with opening her up to a more spiritual and less religious outlook on life. One of the first ideas I ever shared with her was that we are spirits on a human journey. I believe that we select the life we want to experience, getting a preview of all its joys and pitfalls before we make the final decision to take on the human form.

Tiggy chose a tough life, marrying me. Not only was I wild to her straight, which took some adjustment for us both, but I presented her with one health challenge after another. She's done far more caring of me than I would have wanted. She deserved so much more, and I genuinely wish I'd brought her more fun and less stress. I've always admitted that apart from working hard on the radio, I can be pretty lazy. I act when I need to, but only then. Many is the time that I turned up five minutes before a show, giving my producers a high degree of stress, because I knew I could get away with it and I liked the energy from being on the edge.

It's the same in my marriage. Tiggy is a producer and has the skills to run everything brilliantly. So, I've let her. As she says, I only work when there's a gun to my head or a mic in front of my mouth. Got to say, I've been bloody lucky — although I do think I've worn her out, which I feel bad about. She'll have a good rest when I'm gone.

As long as we were connected, she was happy. I've been a radio man — one of a dying breed (literally) of jocks who went into this medium because we wanted to share the thing we were most passionate and excited about: music. It was never about fame or money. I know that Tiggy wouldn't have been attracted to me if it had been. She loves honest, real people. I know she's always respected me the most when she's watched me at work. I don't know why. A radio studio is just where I've always belonged, and so I guess working the desk and talking on mic became second nature to me.

Over the years my music knowledge has earned me some brownie points too. She always reminded me how blessed I was to fall into the right job at such a young age. I was 21. There is, however, a downside to being a radio man — which she also reminds me about. We're in the driving seat, often alone, with no one talking back to us. She is the opposite. A real people person who cares about those in her life. She's incredibly loved because she gives love. She's found it hard that I've lacked such qualities.

Outspoken as she always has been with me, she said to me at our very final party at home, when I DJed live for the last time, "Just because you're f***ing dying, doesn't mean you can be rude to everyone!" I have been ill a lot and an introverted, insular DJ — with a wild streak. What did she do to deserve me? Well, as I tell her whenever she gets upset, "Darlin' — you chose this life!"

I think we've learnt a lot from each other. Marriage isn't easy, and somehow we've made it to the end, largely thanks to her forgiveness of my stupidities and failings. I do wonder where and when she and I will meet again. Will we live another life together, and if so, what will the relationship be? I pretty much know it will be her turn to lean on me. That is, if she ever needs to come back again ■

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Failed state

The Caribbean nation of Haiti is now at the mercy of gangs bent on kidnap, rape and murder. *Louise Callaghan* meets their victims — and confronts a warlord

A gang member armed with an assault rifle in Port-au-Prince, July 2024

Beatrice was wearing her school uniform the day she disappeared: a yellow blouse and blue trousers. Her mother, Roseline, had dropped her off at the bus stop that morning and waved goodbye. When she got home she realised that Beatrice had forgotten her dinner money and called the head teacher to ask him to let her get lunch from the canteen on credit. He told her Beatrice hadn't come to school.

She had been taken by the gangs that control almost all of their home city, the Haitian capital of Port-au-Prince: teenage boys and young men who sit on broken sofas at intersections, leaning assault rifles against their knees, ruling the place after they pushed out the government a year and a half ago. Beatrice was 15 years old, her favourite subject was maths — and she was gone.

Roseline called her friends, looked around the neighbourhood. She found out that the bus had broken down on the way to school. Beatrice had been waiting by the side of the road with the other passengers when masked men came and took her and two of the others: a young woman and a young man. "I was looking everywhere, asking everyone," Roseline, 39, told me at a women's shelter in Port-au-Prince.

Today, Haiti is the poorest country in the Caribbean and Latin America. It has a similar GDP per capita to Bangladesh. Half the population do not have enough to eat. Hundreds of thousands of children are malnourished.

In the capital there is no accountability, no one in charge, no one who can fix things when they go wrong. In most of Port-au-Prince and its suburbs, where about a quarter of Haiti's 12 million population live, the gangs are the only law. Police are scattered through the 10 per cent of the capital still controlled by the government, where they park their armoured cars at intersections and fire at people they think are gang members. There's only one place you can go to find a missing person — your local "chef", the gang leader who controls your area. Roseline was terrified, but went anyway. He said he'd do what he could.

It would take two silent days before she took more drastic measures.

Empire, slavery, revolution

The Pearl of the Antilles. It's stamped on every licence plate on the cars and motorbikes that choke Port-au-Prince's streets with thick belches of smog. Christopher Columbus landed on the island in 1492 and named it La Isla Española — Hispaniola in its anglicised form. Spain saw vast riches to be made, as well as a strategic gateway to the New World, and

There's only one place you can go to find a missing person — your local "chef", the gang leader who controls your area

Clockwise from left: a gang member prowls the streets after a police officer was murdered in Port-au-Prince last year; the violence has devastated the city; Ruth Guillaune, whose eldest son, Richie, was forced from his motorbike, shot dead and left to rot in the street

colonised it. Through the 17th century French buccaneers and traders gradually began to settle the western coast, as the Spanish withdrew from the area. Hispaniola was first formally divided in 1697, when Spain recognised French control over the western third of the island, which became known as Saint-Domingue. The Spanish-held east was Santo Domingo.

In the late 18th century Saint-Domingue was the richest and most productive colony in the world. After enslaving and exterminating the indigenous Taino population through disease and mistreatment, white slave owners on sugar and coffee plantations began importing slaves from Africa to work the land. They died too, but the slave owners just brought more.

Slave labour on the plantations generated immense wealth for France. Then, in 1791, slaves in Saint-Domingue turned on their masters. The largest slave uprising since Spartacus stood against the Roman republic had begun. As Toussaint Louverture, a former slave turned military commander, gained success on the battlefield, he won control over the colony.

In 1804 Saint-Domingue declared its independence from France: a free nation governed by former slaves. Jean-Jacques Dessalines, a revolutionary who would become the country's first leader, christened the new nation Haiti after its Taino name. He then ordered the extermination of most of the white population, who were paraded in the bay at Port-au-Prince, where they were drowned in view of the crews of foreign merchant ships. Others were beheaded or bayoneted.

The revolution and the reprisals came at a cost. Haiti was economically isolated. It was further crippled when, in 1825, France sent a naval fleet with 14 warships and 500 cannon to Port-au-Prince to force Haiti to pay a huge indemnity to compensate former slave owners. Haitian leaders had a choice to make: pay up or face war. They paid.

Historians say that debt to the French, only paid off in 1947, is one of the factors that brought Haiti where it is today. Repayments stalled its development at a time when other Caribbean nations were growing tourist industries. Next door, divided by a border that runs through Hispaniola, is the ➤

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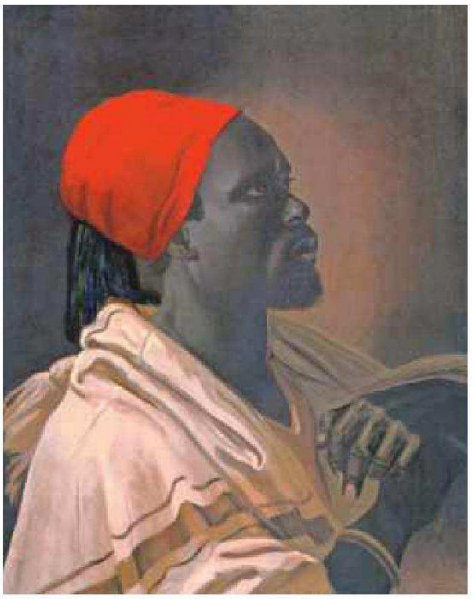
Dominican Republic, established after the 1844-56 war of independence from Haiti, whose leaders had occupied the eastern part of the island. Now home to luxury resorts, it is visited by more than ten million tourists a year and has a GDP per capita five times higher than that of its neighbour.

Another factor in Haiti's decline is undoubtedly the corruption and violence of its leaders, which in the 20th century ranged from dictators such as François Duvalier, known as "Papa Doc", and his son, Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier — whose rule was characterised by untrammelled despotism and massacres — to periods of political instability marked by coups and contested elections.

Then, at 4.53pm on January 12, 2010, a 7-magnitude earthquake tore through Port-au-Prince, killing at least 100,000 people (the Haitian government estimates three times that number were killed). More than 1.3 million people became homeless. In the aftermath, UN peacekeepers accidentally introduced cholera through contaminated wastewater at one of their bases, which killed more than 10,000 people. Foreign peacekeepers and NGO workers were accused of sexually exploiting Haitian women and children. Haitians, most of whom are highly suspicious of foreign intervention, saw this as yet another example of colonial violence and racism.



From left: slaves in Saint-Domingue, later named Haiti, took revenge on their French masters in a bloody uprising in 1791; Toussaint Louverture led the revolt, winning control of the colony. Below: corpses lie in the street after a gang attack in Port-au-Prince last year

Executions and kidnappings

Meanwhile, the country's leaders continued to steal money from their people. Very little of the billions of dollars that came pouring in from donors across the world to international aid organisations made it into the local economy. The ingredients for the state's collapse were there.

The trigger came on the night of July 7, 2021, when 28 mercenaries broke into the home of Jovenel Moïse, the president, and executed him. After that, the gangs who already held power in some parts of the city, backed by current and former politicians who used them to enact their agenda, saw their moment. Kidnappings soared, particularly among the elite, whose sons and daughters were snatched from the street.

Early last year the gangs pushed their way across the city, setting up checkpoints, freeing thousands of prisoners and blocking the roads out of the capital. A multinational security support mission sent to assist Haitian forces in response has been criticised for achieving little. Now Port-au-Prince is under siege. The only way out is by helicopter or the few flights from the airport, which is also surrounded by gangs. For all but a fraction of the population, it's impossible to leave.

The dead are left to rot in the street. Ruth Guillaune, whose son Richie was killed by the gangs — they pulled him over one day when he was riding his motorbike, robbed him and shot him — said it took her a day to find his body. By the time she got there, most of it had been eaten by stray dogs. She spent a day crouched next to him, throwing stones at the dogs so they wouldn't take what was left — part of his jaw and most of his torso and legs — but by the time the ambulance came to take the remains, they said there was too little to go to the mortuary, so she buried him in the dirt where he died.

"He was always by my side," she said as she sat on the floor of a makeshift displacement camp, breastfeeding her youngest son.

No justice, no accountability

The gangs have absolute power. Young men armed with assault rifles, and some women, sit at their makeshift checkpoints, blasting music and drinking. They order boys to go and fetch things, or girls to cook and clean, or to scrub the nails on their hands and feet. "Each child has their role in the group," said Jean, a humanitarian worker who lives in an area controlled by the gangs and spoke to us on condition we didn't use his real name. "There are children who are there to buy food, some girls are [sexually exploited], do laundry and manicures for the armed men."

The violence is constant and pointless. One night I sat drinking pastis with the two founders of Port-au Prince jazz festival in

the hilltop enclave still controlled by the government, and we talked about the illustrious Hotel Oloffson, a 19th-century mansion downtown where, just a few years ago, a band used to play every Thursday night, and people from all walks of life would come together to dance.

Later that evening the gangs burnt down the hotel, seemingly for no reason at all.

There is no justice, no accountability. Over two days in December, more than 200 elderly men and women living in Wharf Jérémie, a gang-controlled area by the bay, were massacred after the "chef" in the area, known as Micanor, decided they should be sacrificed as part of what locals said was a voodoo ceremony.

Mackenson Cangé's father was killed the first night. His name was Marcel, he was 76 years old, a devoted member of the local church and a well-known figure in the community. He was at home with his wife when the gangs came and took him.

They didn't say why. Later a rumour started that Micanor's son had been sick and that he'd had everyone he'd suspected of being a voodoo practitioner — anyone who might have cursed him — murdered in retaliation. But Cangé said that wasn't true.

"He just wanted to do his own sacrifice," he told me. "And that's what he did."

Thirteen days after Cangé's father was killed, his mother, Justinette, died in hospital. They said her heart gave out. Micanor, Cangé said, is still in charge of the area. "He's still there, he's still killing people, he's still doing whatever he wants."

The calculated use of rape

Rose Charline Calixte, a midwife, sees them nearly every day: women and girls who are brought in, broken, to the Médecins Sans Frontières clinic in Cité Soleil, a gang-controlled area, after having been raped by the armed groups. One 14-year-old girl had been kidnapped and taken to one of their bases. They'd held her there for days, gang-raping her. They tattooed her skin, inscribing her with mocking insults.

"These women are at the mercy of these gangs," Calixte said. "They rape them again and again."

Women are raped everywhere, she said: in the street, at the market, on their way to school. Since many have no way of leaving the area where they live, the abuse is often repeated. About a fifth of the cases she receives are children. Chrislie Luca, executive director of OCCED'H, a child protection charity, said they have received cases of teenage girls raped by the armed groups, and a six-year-old girl who was raped in a displacement camp.

Katia Hilaire, psychologist at the Fondation Toya, said the rapes are not just the product of a lawless society. They're a strategy, a way to assert control over an area and subjugate the people there.

Since her abduction, Beatrice rarely speaks. "I have nightmares," she whispered. She is now HIV positive

"Most often, the cases I encounter are victims of gang rapes," she said at her clinic in Port-au-Prince. "When the [gangs] take a neighbourhood, they'll come into a woman's home, murder her husband in front of her, then beat and rape her. And the children are witnesses — or the children, particularly the little girls, are raped too."

Rescuing Beatrice

Roseline waited for two days for her local gang leader to tell her where her daughter was. By the second night she had heard nothing. At 3am she walked over to his house and sat down outside. If he didn't find Beatrice, she decided, she'd kill herself right there on his steps.

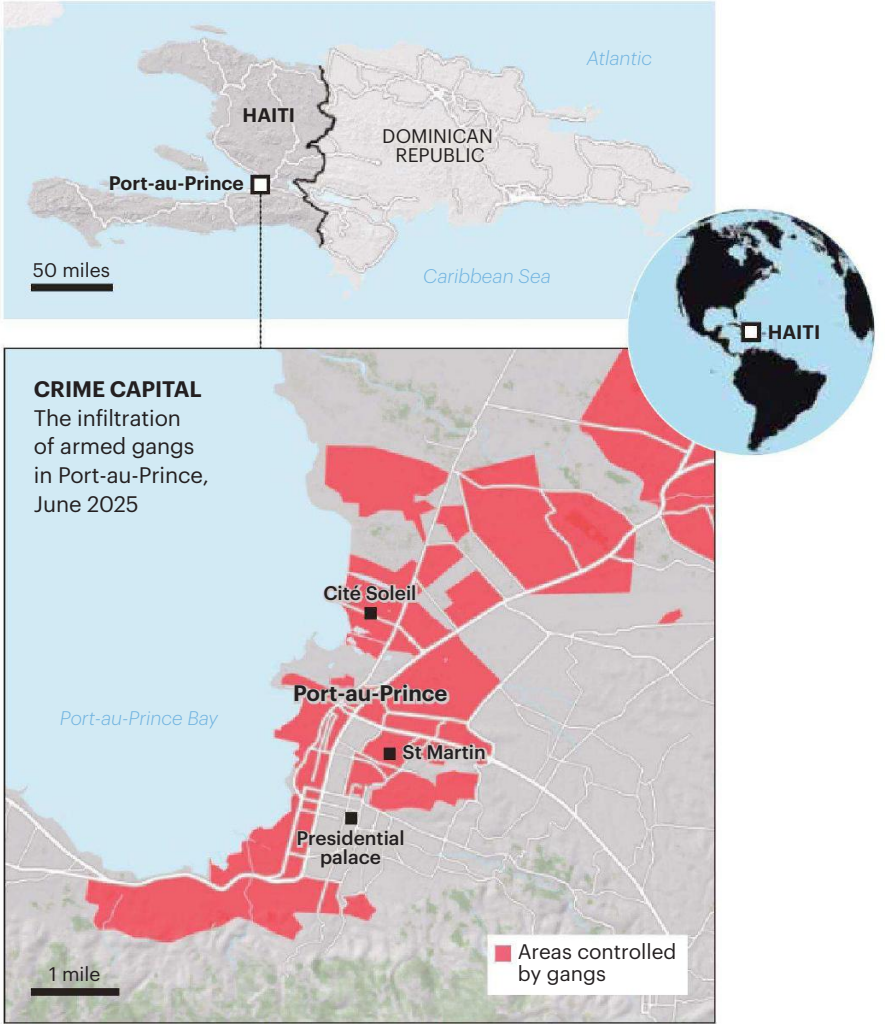
"I knew I had to get my daughter, and that was it," she said.

At 8am he came out. She begged him. He made a phone call. Then another. Then another. And then they knew. Beatrice was alive. And they'd agreed to give her back.

Roseline hadn't eaten in three days. She hadn't slept. When the time came, she got into the car with the gang members from her area and they drove to a meeting point. They waited. Then a car came and a group of men bundled Beatrice out and threw her in the back seat next to her mother. Her school uniform was covered in blood, her neck gouged with deep scratches.

Months after Beatrice was kidnapped, she and Roseline are living at a women's shelter run by OCCED'H. They can't go home because the kidnappers could come back and hurt Beatrice again. "The police don't control anything," Roseline told me. "They [the gangs] are the ones in charge."

Since it happened, Beatrice rarely speaks. She stares into space or scrolls through TikTok on her phone. Sometimes she wakes up screaming, calling out for her mother. "I have nightmares," she said in a whisper. ➤



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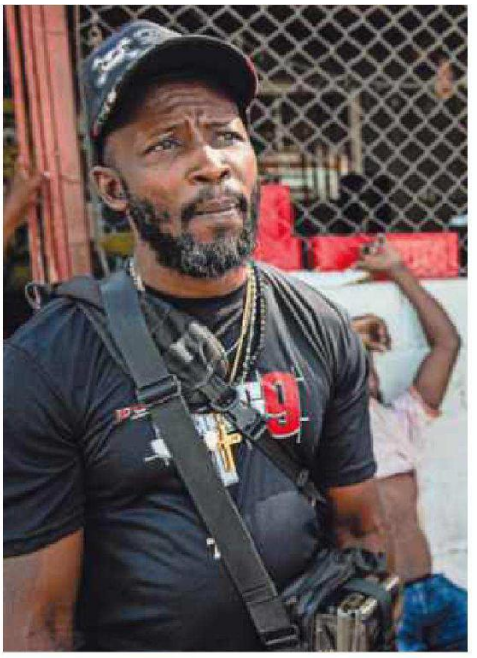


When we talked, with her mother sitting next to her, Beatrice said she didn't remember any of the men who raped her saying anything. All she recalls is the screams of the other two, who had been taken with her, and that she asked for her mother. Now her injuries are healing. But she's HIV positive as a result of the attack, in a place where it's difficult to access consistent medical treatment.

Neither Beatrice nor her mother think there is any chance of finding justice. "If God granted me the power, I'd kill all of them," Roseline said. "All of them."

From left: police guard suspects in the 2021 murder of Jovenel Moïse, the Haitian president, in January; local police officer Samuel Joasil has lead the resistance against the gangs. Below: Fritz Alphonse Jean, head of the Transitional Presidential Council

An orchestrated collapse

The closest thing Haiti has to a government sits on top of a hill in the patch of the city that isn't controlled by the gangs. Behind the gates of Villa d'Accueil we met Fritz Alphonse Jean, head of the Transitional Presidential Council and technically the leader of Haiti. Jean is an economist and former prime minister who took on the role in March. For him, the violence in Haiti today exists by design. "The chaos we are living in did not fall from the sky," he said. "This is something that has been constructed."

Over the decades, he said, the state was captured by bad actors, including businessmen and politicians, who backed the gangs (Jean has also been accused of corruption, which he denies). The gangs gained money and power from kidnapping and extortion, and eventually became independent of their backers.

"Since the state was not able to deliver the services to the populations, those people put arms and ammunition into the hands of the most vulnerable young people," he said.

The impact of Haiti's collapse on the wider region is growing every day. Tens of thousands have fled the country in the past two years, on boats to the US or to other Caribbean islands, or overland to the Dominican Republic — which sent back more than 200,000 Haitians last year.

According to reports from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Haiti, which lies on smuggling routes from Colombia and Jamaica to the US, is becoming a hub for transnational crime including trafficking of guns, drugs, people and the transfer of illicit funds.

While drugs have always passed through Haiti, researchers say, these routes used to be essentially controlled by the country's leadership and private business interests. Now they've been taken over by the gangs, which are working to consolidate and expand them. For now, the trade that goes through Haiti is a tiny fraction of the tens of billions of dollars that pass through Mexico every year. But as the gangs expand into other parts of the country, this is likely to grow.

Yet, Jean said, the state is beginning to fight back — with outside help.

Taking on the gangs

Earlier this year reports emerged that Erik Prince — an American businessman and former Navy Seal who gained international notoriety after his private military contracting group, Blackwater, massacred civilians in Iraq in 2007 — had been hired by the Haitian state to protect what remained of their territory in Port-au-Prince.

Since then foreign mercenaries, which have for years had a presence in Haiti, have been spotted around the capital. Prince's

Mercenaries have launched drone strikes that have killed 300 people, including gang members — but no gang leaders

company Vectus Global and other foreign military contractors have been involved in protecting areas held by the state, and this month announced that they are preparing to increase operations there to win back control of gang-controlled areas. Since the beginning of this year they have also launched drone strikes targeting gang leaders. If the objective was to kill leaders and take back control of territory from the gangs, they have been unsuccessful. Instead, the drone strikes have killed about 300 people, including gang members, but none of their leaders.

In practice, much of the reason why the state was able to hang on to part of the city was because of a local police officer, Samuel Joasil, in a district called Canapé Vert. I met him in the office of Pierre Espérance, a lawyer and human rights advocate. Joasil told me how he had brought together a group of policemen, former policemen and soldiers from the area to fight the gangs.

Under his command they'd gathered networks of volunteers, known as brigades, to keep watch from key points in the neighbourhood, and alert them if they saw gangs trying to breach the perimeter. Where other neighbourhoods fell, this one held firm. And because Canapé Vert lies on a key intersection, Joasil and his men prevented the gangs from moving up towards the last government-held areas, where the international organisations keep their offices and the presidential council meets.

Joasil knew that to keep the gangs out, he had to make people in the area feel safe. "We wanted to let people know that the house you spent your life working to build, working hard, there's no need for you to flee the area," he said. "Because there's someone that's helping you."

He said he has been offered money and property to join the side of the gangs, but refused. Still, Joasil's forces have been accused of acting like gangs (accusations he denies) and of taking insufficient precautions to stop killing civilians when they go into battle with the armed groups.

They may now be about to play a bigger role than before. Jean, Haiti's de facto president, said that the police, with assistance from the foreign private military contractors, are trying to push the gangs back. Groups such as Joasil's form a key part of that alliance and are being armed by the police — and fighting alongside them.

"Just like how they're making us scared, we'll try to make them scared the same way," Joasil said. "So when the people revolt, they'll actually revolt."

So far, that hasn't happened.

Confronting "Barbecue"

Beatrice was kidnapped in an area controlled by a gang leader known as Barbecue. He is probably the most powerful person in Port-au-Prince: the head of the Viv Ansanm coalition of gangs, which in May this year ➤

CLARENS SIFFROY FOR THE SUNDAY TIMES MAGAZINE. GETTY IMAGES

A state of hunger

There are five levels of hunger that humanitarian organisations use to determine the level of food insecurity. In South Sudan about 2.5 million people — 21 per cent of the population — live at four and five, the most extreme. In Haiti, a two-hour flight from Miami and a four-hour drive from the beach resorts of the Dominican Republic, there are 2.1 million — 18 per cent of the population — living at that level.

One weekend we witnessed the World Food Programme (WFP) distributing food. More than 7,000 people lined up in the sun to receive bags of rice, beans and oil. Five years ago most of them wouldn't have been here. Haiti's food crisis has escalated at an extraordinary rate. Families who lived fairly comfortable lives a few years ago are now going hungry.

As we watched people queue for sacks of rice, John-Martin Bauer, director of food security analysis at the WFP, said that as the need is growing, the amount of aid coming into Haiti is falling.

The UN has said that Haiti needs $900 million (£670 million) in aid this year. So far the country has received 9 per cent of that. USAID has slashed its budget and shut down projects on President Trump's orders, but it's also the entire western humanitarian system that is, Bauer said, "turning inwards" and cutting its funding. Cholera and malnutrition are growing, but over the past few months about 100,000 children have lost access to nutrition treatment, he added.

"We need to step up, do a lot more to come and assist the Haitian population at its time of greatest need," Bauer told me.

There's also a growing belief among Haitians, however, that pumping in money from abroad doesn't change a thing. Haiti has received more than $13 billion in international aid since 2010. None of the 3,000 NGOs in the country got in the way of a gang takeover.

"There's billions and billions of dollars spent here, and you can't really see it," said Louino Robillard, who runs Gwoup Konbit, a mutual aid organisation that aims to help Haitians help themselves. "Of course money can be used as a tool to help with the solution. But the solution first of all, it should be within Haitians — to work together for our common goal."

FROM THE AUTHOR OF

ONE TWO THREE FOUR

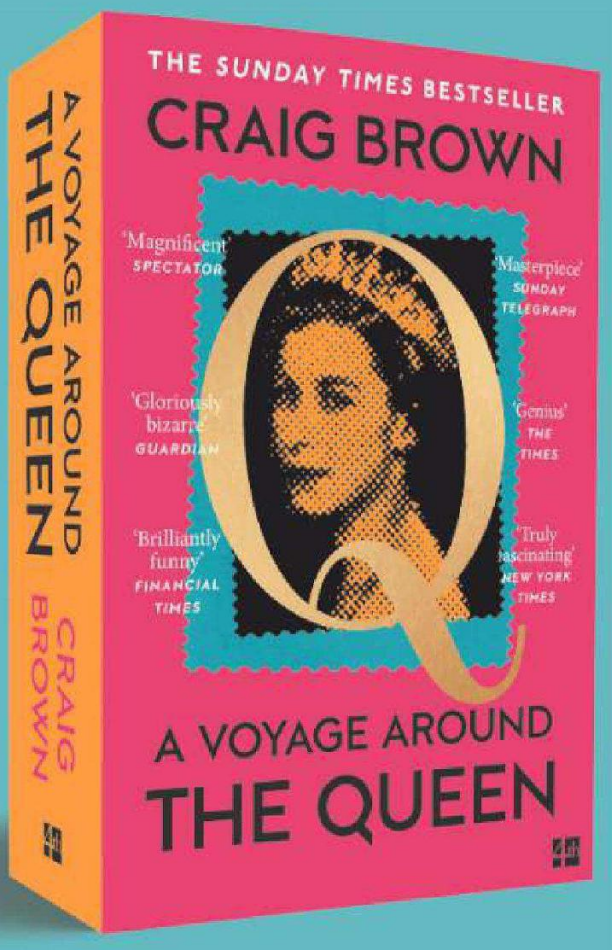
AND *MA'AM DARLING*

'A crown jewel among royal biographies'
OBSERVER

'Magnificent'
SPECTATOR

'Masterpiece'
SUNDAY TELEGRAPH

'Genius'
THE TIMES



'Gloriously bizarre'
GUARDIAN

'Fascinating'
NEW YORK TIMES

'Brilliantly funny'
FINANCIAL TIMES

'Complete bliss from start to finish'
INDIA KNIGHT, *SUNDAY TIMES*

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4th ESTATE

From left: the gang leader known as Barbecue is a former policeman, Jimmy Chérizier; leading his gang in Port-au-Prince, 2024

was designated a terrorist group by the US government. Once Barbecue was a police officer called Jimmy Chérizier. Now he's a warlord whose men are accused of raping and killing at will, and who has a $5 million (£3.7 million) US bounty on his head after federal prosecutors announced criminal charges against him earlier this month.

He has used interviews with foreign journalists and influencers before to market himself, painting himself as a revolutionary in the mould of Louverture and Dessalines. I didn't want to help him do that. But I did want to have a chance to see what life is like inside the areas he controls, and to put the allegations we'd heard straight to him. I wanted him to know about Beatrice.

So on a Sunday afternoon Clarens Siffroy, a Haitian photographer, and I got on the backs of two motorbikes and were driven, as fast as the throttle would take us, through the police lines and into gang territory.

First we passed through the dead zone: a frontier wasteland of grey water and tattered plastic bags caught on the bones of what were once houses. We drove through a great smear of fresh red liquid spilt over an intersection, spent bullet casings clattering under the wheels.

Then we were into his territory. Along one road there was a row of pastel-coloured breezeblock houses of the type Caribbean countries put on their postcards. They were completely gutted, the shells populated only by a few teenage boys with assault rifles.

Rubbish lay in drifts on the streets. People picked their way through puddles and snarls of traffic. I stared at a man in a pristine blue suit, walking elegantly around an open sewer. Then we were there, in the neighbourhood of St Martin.

Barbecue hadn't arrived yet ("*Il va se baigner*," they told me — he was going to have a bath) but his men were there, and they were drunk. One of them, who at 44 was much older than the rest, asked if I wanted a bottle of Prestige, the local beer. When I said no, he got himself one and opened it with the barrel of his pistol.

We sat down in the abandoned shell of what was once a clinic funded by the US Agency for International Development (USAID). After half an hour a car rolled up and Barbecue, dressed in sand-coloured fatigues, got out and sat down. I asked him questions in French, which he speaks fluently, and he answered in Creole. He described himself as the "grandson" of Dessalines, and told me how he was at the head of an uprising of marginalised people in Haiti, who were fighting against a broken state governed by corrupt elites. "We are a group of young men and young women who come from the poorest of the poor, from the worst of the worst, who take up arms, who fight against the system," he said.

We drove over fresh red liquid and bullet casings into Barbecue's territory. I started asking him about Beatrice

I started asking him about Beatrice, and he asked where she was kidnapped. In one of the areas you control, I said. He wanted more information, but I didn't want to give it to him in case his men figured out who she was and took revenge on her for speaking to me. He told me he had a daughter and could never countenance the idea that his men were rapists. He said he was a family man.

"I'm not saying she's lying," he said, later adding: "I am not saying that these acts do not happen… But if they happen, it is because I am not aware. If I knew, we would take the measures we had to take."

All I could think of was how Beatrice, who her mum said used to be outgoing and chatty, now barely speaks above a whisper. She doesn't talk to her friends any more. After Roseline brought her back, everyone in their area knew what had happened. The kids at school made fun of her.

As Barbecue and I talked, the young men he'd brought with him filmed the interview on their phones, leaning their assault rifles against the wall. One of them, who was wearing Gucci sunglasses, had a flask of rum sticking out of his back pocket.

Barbecue said there was no evidence that his fighters were committing rapes and massacres. I said: if I send you the proof, will you commit to bringing the people who did it to justice? He said yes. Five days later I emailed him a file with the proof we'd found of rape being used as a weapon of war by his men. I sent him Beatrice's story.

And I waited. No reply ■

CLARENS SIFFROY FOR THE SUNDAY TIMES MAGAZINE. GETTY IMAGES

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TABLE TALK

Fancy French?

Matthew Ryle's leek and potato vichyssoise — traditionally served cold

PLUS Charlotte Ivers reviews the Salusbury ● Pete Brown pushes a trolley through Tesco ● Great chardonnay for under £17

MATTHEW RYLE

Chef Matthew Ryle hasn't let the fact that he grew up near Reading stop him from becoming a champion of French food. Even his mentor Raymond Blanc praised his "deep love and passion" for France's "humble home-cooked dishes". Ryle has put his knowledge to use at two of London's most respected restaurants, Maison François and Cafe François. He always likes to return to the classics — as seen in these recipes from his new book. "It's the simple methods and recipes from my college days that remain the tools I rely on most," he says.

Vichyssoise

Although it's traditionally served cold, this leek and potato soup is also great warmed up. Sweat the onion, shallots and leeks at a very low temperature for a long time to extract their maximum natural sweetness. And blend it for a full 5 minutes: the super-smooth velvety texture is what makes vichyssoise so special.

Ingredients

(Serves 4 as a starter or light meal)

- 150g butter
- 1 onion, finely sliced
- 2 shallots, finely sliced
- 3 leeks, white parts only, finely sliced
- 3 garlic cloves, chopped
- 150g peeled and chopped potato (about half a large one)
- 2 bay leaves
- A 50:50 mix of whole milk and water, to cover
- Salt and pepper
- Croutons and chopped chives, to serve

1 Put a wide-based pan over a medium-low heat and add the butter. When it has melted, sweat the onion, shallots, leeks and garlic until very soft but not coloured, about 15 min. Add the remaining ingredients, season well and bring to the boil, then gently simmer for another 10-15 min or until the potatoes are completely soft.

2 Remove the bay leaves, then transfer the vegetables to a blender using a slotted spoon, leaving the liquid behind in the pan for now. Start blending, adding ladles of liquid until you get the correct consistency.

3 Blend for 5 min until very smooth, then pour through a fine sieve into a clean pan or bowl. Check the seasoning, then leave the soup to cool if you want to eat it chilled. Scatter with the croutons and chives before serving.

Chicken chasseur

A great make-in-advance meal, chasseur is perfect for a party — just follow the recipe until the chicken is cooked, then chill. Reheat it when you're ready to go, adding the tomatoes and chopped tarragon. Serve with rice or mashed potatoes.

Ingredients

(Serves 4)

- 1½ tbsp olive oil
- Salt and pepper
- 10 chicken pieces, on the bone
- 2 onions, finely chopped
- 60g butter
- 200g button mushrooms, halved
- 3 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- 50ml brandy
- 30g tomato puree
- 2 tbsp plain flour
- 125ml white wine
- 400ml chicken stock
- 4 tomatoes, chopped
- 2 tsp tarragon leaves, finely chopped

1 Place a large ovenproof pan over a medium heat. Add the oil, season the chicken pieces and colour on both sides, skin side first. Remove the chicken from the pan. Cook the onions for 2 min, then add the butter, mushrooms and garlic. Cook for another 3 min, then add the brandy and cook until it has evaporated. Add the tomato puree and cook for 2 min.

2 Heat the oven to 180C fan/gas 6. Add the flour to the pan and cook over a low heat for about 3 min, then slowly add

PATRICIA NIVEN. GETTY IMAGES

the wine, stirring. Once it's fully absorbed add the stock, again gradually and in stages.

3 Return the chicken to the sauce, this time skin side up, and place in the oven for 30-40 min or until fully cooked. Add the tomatoes and tarragon to the chasseur, warm through and serve.

Pissaladière

To make your life easy, I would recommend cooking your onions in advance and using ready-rolled puff pastry. If you have both these components in the fridge ready to go, this is a very simple recipe to make.

Ingredients

(Serves 4 as a light meal, or more as a starter or canapé)

- 4 onions, sliced
- 4 tsp olive oil, plus extra
- Salt and pepper
- 320g shop-bought all-butter puff pastry sheet
- 25 good-quality anchovy fillets from a tin or jar (see Kitchen Clinic, right)
- 25 black olives, ideally niçoise
- Leaves from 4 thyme sprigs

1 Put the onions and oil in a wide pan over a medium heat. Cover with a lid and steam-fry for about 5 min. Add a pinch of salt and remove the lid to allow the liquid to evaporate, then continue to cook slowly, stirring frequently, until you have a dark caramelised mass. You want the onions to stick slightly — scraping them from the bottom of the pan is what allows them to achieve that deep brown colour.

2 Heat the oven to 220C fan/gas 9. Rub a baking tray with olive oil and place your puff pastry sheet on top. Top with the caramelised onions and spread nearly to the edges, leaving just a small section of visible crust. Bake for 15-20 min. The crust should puff up and take on a nice colour and the underside should be crisp.

3 Decorate the baked tart with anchovies, olives and thyme, then finish with some olive oil and cracked black pepper. Traditionally the anchovies form a lattice pattern, with the olives in the middle of each diamond. Cut into pieces and enjoy while it's still warm ■

Extracted from *French Classics* by Matthew Ryle (Bloomsbury £26). To order, go to timesbookshop.co.uk

KITCHEN CLINIC

Our experts answer your questions

Q How are tinned anchovies different from the white ones bought in oil and often flavoured with garlic?
David Porter

A Properly fresh anchovies have a mild, delicate flavour and are usually served either lightly coated in flour and deep-fried or baked with fine breadcrumbs. You can buy them frozen online from thefishsociety.co.uk.

The "fresh" anchovies you might see in tubs in supermarkets and delis are actually marinated in vinegar, which extends their shelf life and turns the flesh a pale creamy colour. They are then stored in oil and can be flavoured with garlic, citrus and parsley. Known as *boquerones* in Spanish, they are typically served as tapas, but they can also be gently fried.

When most of us talk about anchovies, we mean the dark, intensely salty fillets you buy in tins and jars. They have been cured in salt and have a much stronger, more fishy flavour. As well as going on pizzas or in niçoise salads, they are great for adding umami depth to roast lamb or pasta sauces as they collapse and dissolve in the heat ■

By Tony Turnbull

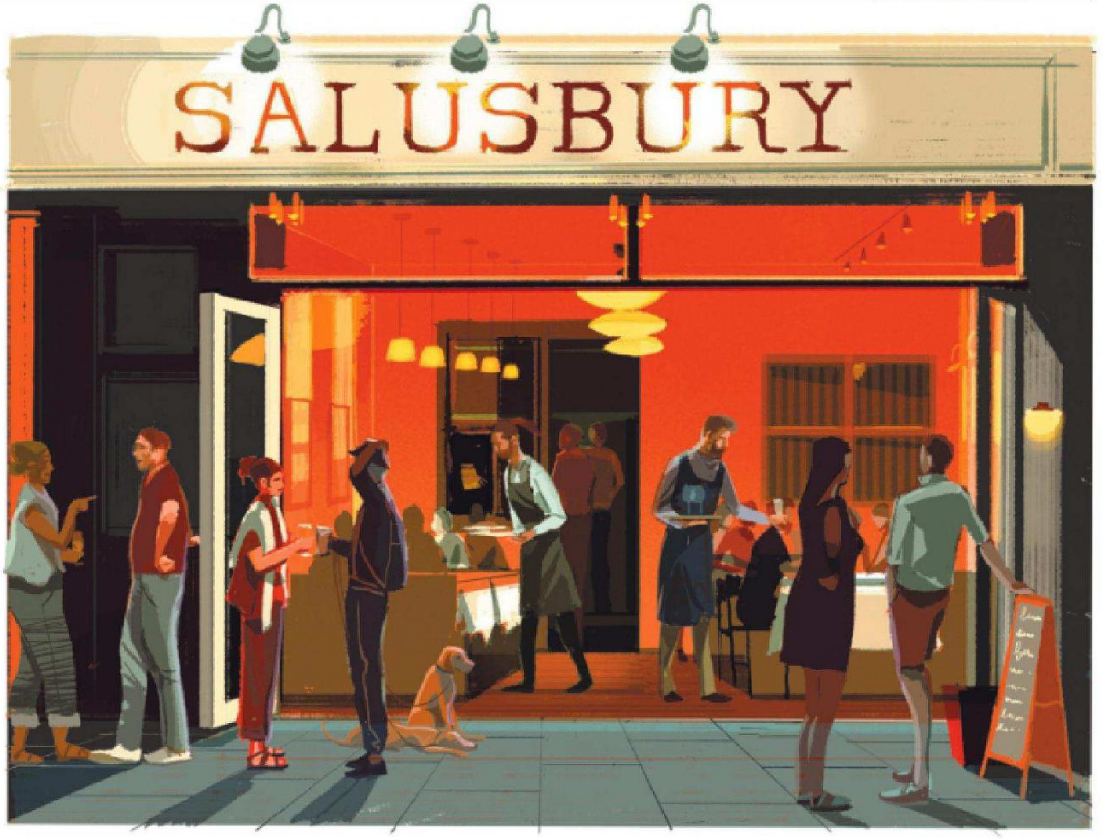
Send questions to kitchenclinic@sunday-times.co.uk

RESTAURANTS • Charlotte Ivers

Another posh pub but I'm not complaining

THE SALUSBURY
QUEEN'S PARK, NW5

★★★★☆



A revamped pub just down the road from me is "hoping to be the Devonshire of northwest London". So says a headline on the restaurant website Hot Dinners anyway.

From the article, I can't actually tell if the team behind the pub used those words themselves. They'd be mad to do so. It's like a headline about a GCSE PE student "hoping to be the next José Mourinho". Someone's being set up for a fall.

The Devonshire is a Soho pub that is astonishingly successful. It's the type of see-and-be-seen place that hasn't really existed since the Nineties heyday of restaurants such as the Ivy and the Wolseley. It has celebs past, present and future in the backroom, crowds of ordinary punters spilling out happily onto one of central London's busiest and least appealing streets. Back in the day, it was much easier to be the place where everyone goes because Britain only had five good restaurants. To achieve that these days is remarkable.

A lot of the best places in London follow a similar format: slightly chaotic boozer plus a white-tablecloth restaurant where you'd take your mum or your boss. There's the Hero in Maida Vale, the Fat Badger in Notting Hill, One Club Row out east, and a host of lesser imitators. Perhaps the formula works so well because everyone can be a part of it. You might not get a table at One Club Row or the Devonshire, but you can pop in for a pint and a snack, and then boast about your big night at the place everyone's talking about.

You've got people out for a fancy dinner rubbing shoulders with groups of lads four pints deep

And now there's one of these in my neck of the woods, Queen's Park. The Salusbury has been refurbed from an old-school boozer of the same name, which was — our waitress says — rather more "dark and cavey" than its current incarnation.

Cynics might argue that this is, in fact, just a pub with a restaurant attached, a concept that was not invented in 2023 by the Devonshire. But there are little touches that give away the cultural heritage of the place: the paper tablecloths on top of the cotton; the cream walls and red banquettes; the fact that a fair few people are drinking Guinness. This part of London has a long Irish history, so it feels rather fitting.

THE DAMAGE

Parmesan churros	£6.50
Burrata	£13
Cured sea bream	£13
Beef tartare	£15
Dorset crab spaghetti	£16
Cornish red chicken	£25
Côte de boeuf (for two)	£85
Bottle of Ixsir Altitudes	£49
2 x glasses of picpoul	£25
Hemingway daiquiri	£12
Negroni	£12
Subtotal	£271.50
Service charge (12.5%)	£33.93
Total (for three)	£305.43

There's something intangibly fun about these places. Perhaps it's because you've got people out for a fancy dinner rubbing shoulders with groups of lads four pints deep — bustle and calm interwoven in a way more obvious at the Salusbury than its rivals because the restaurant isn't upstairs but on the ground floor next to the pub, with patio doors opening onto the street.

The food is decent: a British/European fusion, as at all these places. The service is a little slow, but we don't mind much; it's 8pm on a Friday and it hasn't been open long. It's a chance to bed in for the evening while we dilly-dally over parmesan churros. They're a clever idea: salty and with a lovely crunchy exterior, exactly what you want with a sharp cocktail to start the evening.

The starters are a mixed bag: a very good Dorset crab spaghetti, and a beef tartare tarted up with smoked bone-marrow cream and pommes paille (crispy potato matchsticks). A burrata with peaches, hazelnuts and green beans is underseasoned, though, and a bit of a non-event. Burrata is so ubiquitous that you have to do something rather special with it to justify including it on a menu.

Our mains are a pitch-perfect chicken breast in a rich gravy, served with delicately fried gnocchi and girolle mushrooms, and a côte de boeuf to share: a credit to the cow it came from, served with triple-cooked chips, a green salad and a peppercorn sauce that I only now realise they forgot to bring.

I expect I'll go back. There are enough classics on the menu to make this a decent regular haunt: oysters with hot sauce, roast lamb, chocolate delice — and the less fashionable postcode means you're getting a decent discount compared with other similar places on the scene. A few things aren't quite there yet, but can all be fixed easily. The core of this restaurant, however, is solid. There's a reason everyone's following this formula ■

50-52 Salusbury Street, London NW6 6NN; thesalusbury.co.uk

ILLUSTRATION BY ALEX GREEN / FOLIO ART FOR THE SUNDAY TIMES MAGAZINE. JASON ALDEN, SANE SEVEN

WINE • Will Lyons

Go beyond Burgundy for bargain chardonnay

If you type "white burgundy" into Google, among the top results is: "Why is it so expensive?" Good question. Global demand has caused the price of some of these wines to soar. An entry-level chardonnay from the producer Domaine Arnaud Ente in Meursault will set you back £300 a bottle. If memory serves, when I started writing about wine 25 years ago it was about £10 a bottle. How times change. I'm reminded of that wine-tasting group in Manhattan who formed the ABC club — Anything But Chardonnay — as a protest against the grape's ubiquity and often mediocrity. Is it time for us to form our own club, ABB, or Anything But Burgundy?

For the truth is that despite the oceans of bland wines out there, if you know where to look you can find great chardonnay beyond the confines of its historical homeland in Burgundy. Australia, Argentina, California, New Zealand and South Africa are just some of the countries where the grape thrives, and they offer fantastic value for money. Fine wine producers such as Kumeu River in New Zealand, Yarra Yering in Victoria, Australia, or Hamilton Russell in South Africa all offer single vineyard expressions of exceptional quality for a third of what they'd cost in Burgundy.

But back to more everyday wines: where do you go to find chardonnays for under £20 that punch well above their price tag? As well as the countries above, there are plenty of examples from elsewhere in France — such as 2023 Cuvée IIIB Auromon from Jean-Claude Mas in Limoux (Waitrose, £14.50), which has a lovely floral nose and an oaky texture. Or higher up in the same region, Mark Hoddy makes the rich and creamy 2024 La Voûte Vin de France (The Sunday Times Wine Club, £17.99), which could easily be mistaken for a white burgundy. Here are some more to try ■

2024 Journey's End Honeycomb Chardonnay South Africa (12.5%) Marks & Spencer, £9 Grapes from the Western Cape deliver an oaky, creamy white with appley hints.

2023 Giorno Day Macerato Chardonnay Italy (13%) Waitrose, £10 From Puglia, this is aged in both amphorae and barrels, imparting a soft texture and heady tropical fruit.

2024 Pays d'Oc Chardonnay France (13%) Tanners, £10.90 This smooth, reliable example from the Languedoc is fresh and lemony, with plenty of juicy white fruit on the finish.

2023 Heggies Vineyard Cloudline Chardonnay Australia (13%) Co-op, £14.15 A complex Eden Valley white with smoky notes, a clean, creamy texture and a full finish.

2021 The Society's Exhibition Santa Barbara Chardonnay USA (14%) The Wine Society, £17 This is a lovely chardonnay with velvety oak, tropical fruit and vibrant notes of citrus.

2023 Terrazas de Los Andes Chardonnay Argentina (13.5%) Majestic, £16.50 An elegant South American that combines peach, citrus and a pleasing nuttiness on the finish.

Bargain of the week

2023 The Best Fitou France (13.5%) Morrisons, £8.50 This crowd pleasing red from the Languedoc has rich, succulent black cherry, damson and liquorice.

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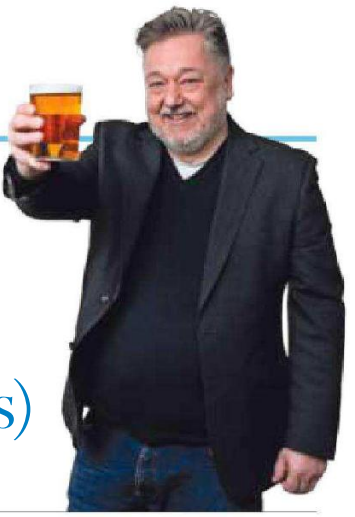


BEER • Pete Brown

The best beers in Tesco (if you don't get lost in the aisles)

Shopping for beer in a big Tesco can be a frustrating experience, especially if you're a pedant like me.

The sign for the aisle reads "beers and lagers" — a pet peeve, given that lager is, in fact, beer. The aisle itself is split into lager and bitter, "bitter" being used as a catch-all for any beer style that isn't lager, including pale ales, stouts, IPAs, Belgian fruit beers, even a lager put there by someone who doesn't know that helles is a style of lager. It makes as much sense as signposting "chicken and meat", then lumping together everything that isn't chicken under the label "beef".

You get the sense this is a retailer that cares more about wine than beer. Tesco's website lists about 50 wines as part of its Finest range — quality drinks sourced exclusively by and for the retailer. There are no Finest beers, and the only ones exclusive to Tesco are a budget lager and a 2 per cent ale that costs £2 for four cans.

So why shop here? Because the people in charge of how the beers are displayed in-store are doing a disservice to the people who source and buy the beers.

It's hard to resist leaving with bags of Proper Job or Landlord you weren't intending to buy

Nationally, Tesco stocks a mind-boggling 700 lines of beer and cider. Yes, that includes 17 types and sizes of Guinness, four each of every bog-standard lager, and so on, but there's much more.

A huge Discovery range (marketed in-store as a subset of "bitter", despite being anything but) includes a solid range of Belgians, German lagers, an extensive range of traditional premium ales, the usual faux-craft brands such as Beavertown and Camden, and a smattering of beers from genuinely independent craft breweries across the country.

Tesco's beer buyer Ben Cole says the appetite for world beers is moving beyond Spain and Italy, which is why he has just introduced Modelo, a decent Mexican lager. Light, fruity beers are also doing well.

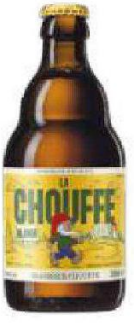
There are always deals to be had too. Clubcard promotions — any four premium bottled ales for £7.50, for instance — make it hard to resist walking out with bags of St Austell Proper Job or Timothy Taylor Landlord that you weren't intending to buy.

So, while they're all available elsewhere, here are six beers I was pleasantly surprised to find in the country's biggest supermarket, at good prices ■

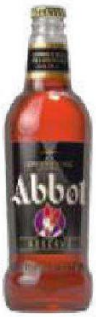
Adnams Ghost Ship 0.5% 500ml, £1.65 Possibly my favourite no/low-alcohol ale, this is the 4.5 per cent Ghost Ship with the alcohol molecules filtered out, but nothing else. It's the same, just slightly thinner in body.

Birra Moretti Sale di Mare (4.8%) 660ml, £3.30 Unlike many of its mainstream rivals, Moretti is drinkable, if uninspiring. But this unfiltered version, with Italian sea salt, is better, with some body and flavour, and an almost herby note.

La Chouffe Blonde (8%) 330ml, £2.95 Belgians are the best at making strong ales; Brits just need to learn how to drink them. The alcohol here is well hidden, but it's still a warming beer to be sipped, maybe with cheese on hand.

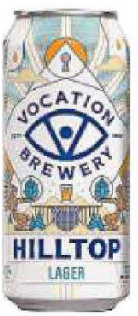


Greene King Abbot Reserve (6.5%) 500ml, £2.75 This proves wrong the snobs who believe Greene King can't make good beer. An amped-up version of award-winning Abbot Ale, it's mellow, rounded and full.

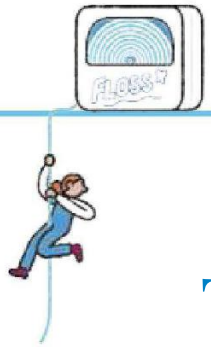


St Austell Proper Job (5.5%) 500ml, £1.99, or £7.50 for four with Clubcard An impeccable balance between traditional British and reinvented American IPA styles, this is aromatic and punchy, yet balanced and highly drinkable.

Vocation Hilltop Lager (4.3%) 4x440ml, £6.75 You'll find lots of beer from West Yorkshire in Tesco. This Hebden Bridge brewer largely makes hazy, juicy pale ales. So this crisp, flavourful lager is a welcome addition.



VICKI COUCHMAN



The new rules of teeth brushing

Brush before breakfast but wait to use mouthwash, says *Rosamund Dean*

We all know we should brush our teeth twice a day, and probably floss. But do you use traditional string, fancier interdental brushes or a high-tech water flosser? Is mouthwash necessary? Is chewing gum good or bad? Here is a commonsense guide to everyday dental care.

Brushing up

"An electric toothbrush does a lot of the work for you," says Dr Sulaman Anwar, a specialist periodontist and principal dentist at Serio Dental in north London. "Brands such as Philips Sonicare have a pressure sensor to stop you brushing too hard and damaging the gums. That said, a manual toothbrush with soft bristles can work if your brushing technique is spot on."

Need a refresher? "Brush for two minutes, in gentle circular motions, with fluoride toothpaste," Anwar says. "Spit out excess toothpaste but don't rinse your mouth." This is a common mistake: it rinses away the protective fluoride.

Dentists recommend brushing before breakfast as eating can soften enamel, which means brushing afterwards can wear it down. "You can damage enamel and gums by brushing too much," he adds. "It's not about brushing more often, but more effectively and gently."

Yes, you need to floss

"If you're not cleaning in between your teeth, you're missing almost half the tooth surfaces in the mouth," Anwar says. "Interdental brushes such as TePe or Stoddard Optim are most effective if there's space between teeth, but traditional floss is best when teeth are tightly packed. Gently curve the floss around each tooth and move it up and down."

A water flosser works by using a jet of pressurised water to remove food, plaque and bacteria from between the teeth. "For most people, traditional flossing or interdental brushes are enough," says Dr Nyree Whitley, the chief clinical officer at mydentist.co.uk. "But a water flosser can be a great addition if you find traditional flossing difficult, have sensitive gums or wear braces."

Mouthwash after brushing will rinse away the protective fluoride left by toothpaste

Freshen up with mouthwash

"It can help with decay prevention but, again, don't use straight after brushing," Anwar says. "It will rinse away the protective fluoride left by toothpaste. Think of throwing water on a varnished wall; if you do it straight away, you wash away the varnish. If you wait, the wall becomes waterproof."

He recommends using mouthwash separately from brushing, for an afternoon freshen-up. Use alcohol-free mouthwashes, as those with alcohol can dry the mouth and disrupt the oral microbiome.

Little white lies

Love tea and coffee? "Rinse your mouth with water afterwards," Anwar advises. And don't brush straight after a coffee: the enamel is softened by the drink.

Beware the claims of whitening toothpastes. "There is no toothpaste with enough hydrogen peroxide to whiten teeth," Anwar says. Your hygienist can remove surface stains, so see them ideally every six months, but at least every two years. Still want a whiter

smile? "At-home whitening kits may contain dangerous levels of hydrogen peroxide," Whitley says. "To safely whiten teeth, ask your dentist."

Healthy habits

Change your toothbrush every three months. If you wear aligners or a mouth guard, clean them properly. "Rinse with cool water to remove any saliva or small pieces of food," Whitley says, "then clean the surfaces with a toothbrush and rinse thoroughly." Never use hot water, as this can warp the shape.

Use a tongue scraper on waking up to remove bacteria and freshen your breath and, during the day, limit sugary and acidic foods while staying hydrated with plenty of water. "Sugar-free gum, especially with xylitol, stimulates saliva, which helps neutralise acids, so is great after meals," Anwar says. "But avoid sugary gum, which feeds harmful bacteria."

Care for baby teeth too

With children, "start brushing teeth as soon as the first milk tooth comes through", Whitley says. "From about three they should learn to brush on their own, using fluoride toothpaste suitable for their age — with supervision." Flossing "should begin when children get their adult teeth, from about six", she insists, though they may need help until they develop the necessary dexterity to do it themselves. By the age of ten, they should be brushing and flossing like you.

Never ignore symptoms

"Bleeding gums are caused by plaque bacteria, a sticky film that builds up around the teeth and gums," Whitley says. "They can also be a symptom of gum disease, so see a dentist." Other symptoms never to ignore include toothache, increased sensitivity or grey/brown spots on your teeth, which can be a sign of decay.

"Gum disease often starts without pain, so regular check-ups are key," Anwar says. "Poor oral health has links to everything from heart disease to dementia." ■

ILLUSTRATIONS BY DAMIEN WEIGHILL FOR THE SUNDAY TIMES MAGAZINE. GETTY IMAGES

FITNESS

Stinky gym kit? Here's what you're doing wrong

Pulling on your gym kit only to get a whiff of last week's spin class is never the motivation you need. Gym clothes are made from breathable fabrics but are also great at clinging on to sweat. This is how to rid yours of the lingering eau de changing room.

Don't turn the temperature up

A hot wash can damage synthetic fabrics such as polyester and elastane and lock in odours. Instead, wash kit at 30C on a low spin cycle (admittedly, this does risk germs sticking around). "Only go warmer if the label allows it or you're sanitising after illness," says Rowan Clift, a training and nutrition specialist for the coaching app Freeletics. Your washing machine may have a specific cycle for sportswear.

Wash kit inside out

The inside of your gym kit is the part most exposed to your sweat and is where odour-causing bacteria are most likely to accumulate. Turn kit inside out before washing. "Remember to check your socks aren't scrunched into balls," says Monty Simmons, a personal trainer. "You want the surface area getting maximum exposure."

Use the right detergent

Fabric softeners leave a coating on clothes that makes them feel smoother, but in performance fabrics it clogs the gaps in the weave. "This kills their moisture-wicking ability and reduces breathability," Clift says. It can also trap bacteria. Instead, use a detergent designed for activewear or add a laundry cleanser — an antibacterial liquid designed to kill germs and "to work effectively at low temperatures", says Olivia Young, a product development scientist at Astonish cleaning products.

Get tough on stains

To target sweat stains Young recommends mixing one part white vinegar to four parts cold water and soaking the item for 15 to 30 minutes before washing. "White vinegar is best for stains such as blood, sweat and the yellowing of fabrics," she says. "It breaks down bacteria and neutralises stubborn odours." For oily or greasy stains, make a paste of three parts bicarbonate of soda to one part water and rub it into the affected area before washing clothes in the machine.

Air out sweaty clothes

"Don't leave damp kit stuffed in your gym bag: bacteria love warmth and moisture," Clift says. Get your dirty workout clothes into the machine as soon as possible to reduce odour and mildew build-up; if you can't wash your kit straight after a workout, hang it up and let it air-dry rather than throwing it into a pile of clothes while wet.

"A tumble dryer will destroy elastic fibres, so after washing it's best to air-dry clothes," Simmons says. "Don't dry your kit where it's cold, dark and damp — your clothes will smell mouldy." A well-ventilated space is best or even outdoors, though direct sunlight can weaken elastane and fade colours.

Fabrics matter

Wash workout clothes separately from heavy or abrasive fabrics such as denim or towels. "This protects delicate fibres from friction damage," Young says. A separate wash also ensures the cycle settings and detergent are optimised for synthetic fabrics. Polyester and nylon blends can handle frequent washes but still require a gentle cycle. Clift suggests using a mesh laundry bag for sports bras, leggings and strappy items to protect the fabric ■

By Yasmin Choudhury

DRIVING • Jeremy Clarkson

The drive of my life was in a Beemer — but not this one

REVIEW
BMW M5 TOURING

Over the years I've enjoyed a great many great drives but what was the best of them all? You might imagine it involved a Lamborghini and an Alp but actually one of the most memorable was across Portugal in a Toyota Starlet.

It was a one-litre shopping box with some windows. But picture the scene. I was 24 years old and had been invited to my first press launch. So Toyota flew me to Lisbon, tossed me the keys to a car that wasn't mine, and told me to go off and have fun with it.

This was the first time I'd been further from home than France. I was therefore so giddy that I whizzed through those eucalyptus forests at any speed that took my fancy. Which was all of it. And I knew I could not have an accident because the Starlet's bonnet is so short you could never actually reach the scene of a crash. You come to a halt long before you get there.

It was a fantastic drive but, on reflection, it was probably topped by a 10-mile dawdle down the Amalfi coast in a 1964 Alfa Romeo Giulia Spider. That's the sort of thing on which all motoring dreams are built. And woe betide any car manufacturer that forgets it. More on this shortly…

Another contender for the "best ever" title was in an utterly ruined Range Rover, driving across the Atacama desert in Chile. It would only do 43mph. If I drove at 42, it stalled. If I did 44, it overheated. It had no headlights, no horn and no wipers — not that those would ever be needed in a part of the world where it hasn't rained for 20 million years.

I didn't care, though. Because there I was, headphones in, listening to some tunes on the iPod, while concentrating furiously on getting that ruined car to the Pacific before nightfall.

It's interesting, isn't it? None of the cars I've talked about are what you'd call great. The Range Rover barely met the dictionary definition of the word "car". But thanks to circumstance, weather, general contentedness and, most of all, scenery, they provided the moments that are etched most fiercely in my on-board cloud. What I'm saying, really, is that you don't need a very good car to have a very good drive.

It does help, though. Which brings me on to what, after some thought, is the best drive of them all. We'd been filming in the Northern Territory in Australia, at a farm that was bigger than Kent, Hampshire, Sussex and Essex put together. And after we'd finished for the day I faced a 20-mile drive, on smooth gravel tracks, back to the bunkhouses where we'd be staying the night. It was a beautiful, diffused evening and the day had gone well, so I grabbed a cold beer, popped it in the cupholder, disengaged the traction control and set off.

The car? It was a BMW M6 Gran Coupe. It lives today only in the bargain basement bin of second-hand car websites. But in

This latest version of the M5 is a good car made stupid. It weighs more than a brontosaurus

my head it's like an old girlfriend. To everyone else she's not particularly special, but because of the memories you have, she just is and always will be.

Actually, I'm being unfair, because BMW's M cars are always special. They're like Mitsubishi Evos and Nissan GT-Rs. If you are a proper petrolhead, it is compulsory to like them. And it is compulsory also to argue about which version was best.

With the Evo, I'd go for the six. No particular reason. I just liked it the most. With the GT-R, I'd have to say, it was the R34. And with the M cars? Hmm. That's tricky. I've driven some fantastic M3s. The CSL was especially wonderful. And I have a soft spot for both the M2 and the aforementioned M6 Gran Coupe. But the best? That has to be the M5.

Which isn't good enough because the true fans out there are now going to demand I say which one. Crikey, that's hard. It's like naming your favourite Corr sister. Obviously, the 2005 E60 with the V10 caused me to bite the back of my hand to stop me crying out. That was a masterpiece, that car. But I'm going to say my favourite was the very first, with the 286-horsepower inline six.

It was amazing. It was like BMW had taken its perfectly competent 5 series and said to the absolute best engineers they had, "Right. That's a good car. Now make it unbelievably brilliant." And that has been the M5 recipe ever since. Good cars, made dazzling.

Until now. Because the latest version is a good car, made stupid.

The essence of an M5 is driving pleasure. And there is no place in such a thing for plug-in hybridisation because while this may increase the power output, it adds a lot of weight. This new M5 is a whopping 600kg heavier than the model it replaces and, I'm sorry, but something that weighs more than a brontosaurus is never going to be much fun to hustle. It's why rhinoceroses can't corner.

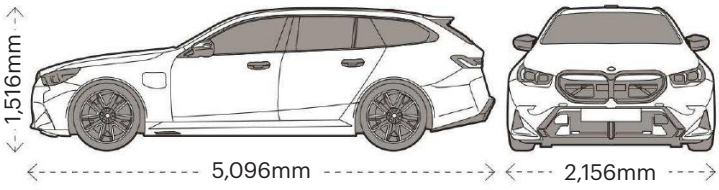
To try to mask the issue, BMW has fitted a mind-boggling array of options that enable the driver to choose how much brake feel he'd like or the steering response or even how many wheels are driven. On and on the options go and it's absurd, because it means you're constantly fiddling. Remember when your hi-fi had a graphic equaliser? Well, it's like that. You think you have it just as you like it but then you think, "Actually, I could do with a tad more treble." Why can't the engineers just set up the car properly and sell it like that?

This electronic nonsense is everywhere. You even adjust the air vents using a button and there's a panel to show you what you've done. And then, when you want to overtake someone, you pull one of the paddles to engage boost mode. Why? What was the matter with kick-down?

I hated all of the software and, to make matters worse, I think if you stripped it all away, you still wouldn't have a very good car. Yes, 717bhp sounds like a lot but when you factor in the 2.5-tonne gut, it isn't. Put it this way: the last non-hybrid M5 produced only 591bhp but you got a better power-to-weight ratio, so actually it was faster.

Looks? I tried the Touring estate version and I thought it was ugly. It also doesn't sound very exciting. And it's not cheap, either. Which means I'm forced to conclude that this car has almost no redeeming features. Yes, because you can plug it in to charge it up Miliband will give you a tenner, but if that's what you're interested in, buy a Hyundai ■

The Clarksometer
2025 BMW M5 Touring



Engine 4395cc, 8 cylinders, twin-turbo, petrol, plus electric motor **Power** 717bhp **Torque** 737 lb ft **Acceleration** 0-62mph: 3.6sec **Top speed** 190mph **Fuel** 157mpg **CO_2** 45g/km **Weight** 2,550kg **Price** £112,500 **Release date** On sale now

Jeremy's rating ★★☆☆☆

GETTY IMAGES

CAR CLINIC

Our experts answer your questions

Q Are there new rules for people over 70 who want to renew their driving licence? What about mandatory eye tests?
DC, Loughborough

A Despite many reports to the contrary, the DVLA has confirmed that there are no immediate changes to the rules for renewing driving licences at 70. However, the government has announced that it will set out proposals to review driving regulations this autumn.

Those proposals are likely to include mandatory eye tests for drivers aged 70 and over. Biennial eye tests are free for anyone over 60, and are recommended every two years anyway.

For the time being the process for renewal at 70 and over remains reliant on people declaring any medical condition that may affect driving — a requirement for all drivers. It includes being able to read a modern (post-2001) number plate at 20 metres and having an adequate field of vision: left, right, up and down. These will be tested when your eyesight is checked by an optician.

All drivers need to renew their licence every ten years with a new photo, so proof of a recent eye test could be built into the process.

So, eyesight tests for car drivers from the age of 70 are not mandatory yet, but may be in the near future ■

Tim Shallcross, independent expert

Send questions to carclinic@sunday-times.co.uk

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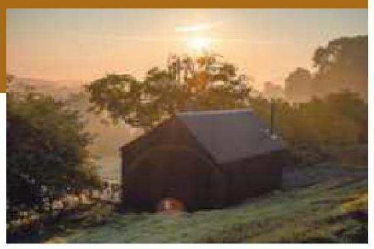

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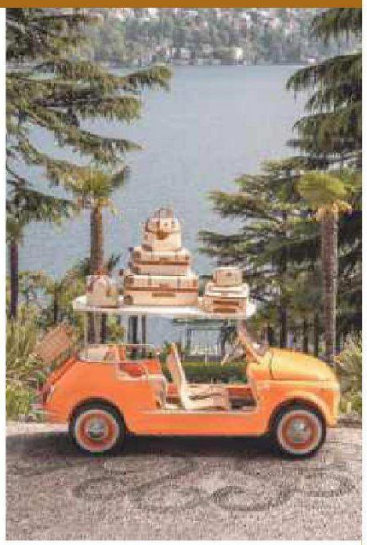

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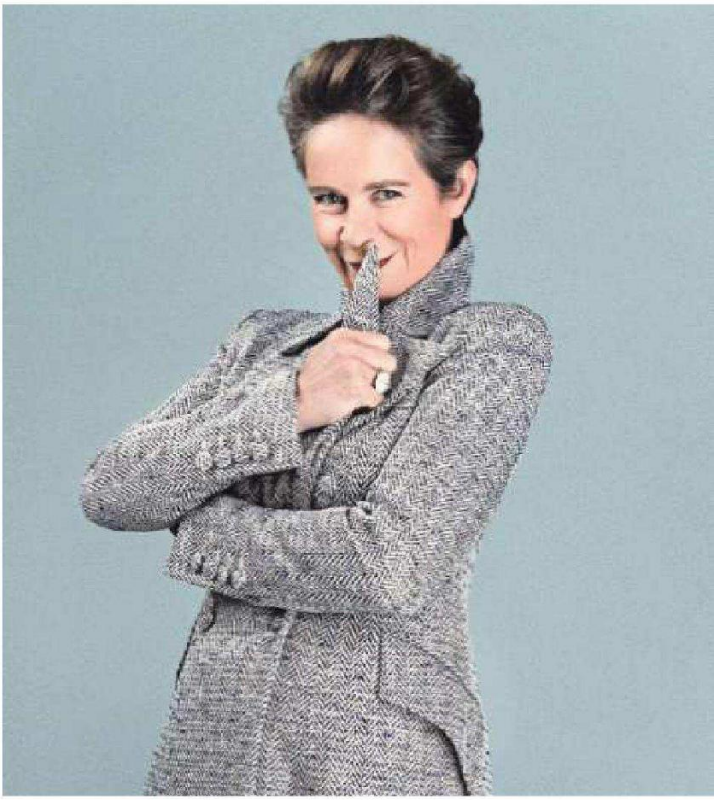
A LIFE IN THE DAY

Celia Imrie

Actress and author, 73

Imrie was born and grew up in Guildford, Surrey, the fourth of five children. Her TV, cinema and theatre CV includes *The Diplomat*, *Calendar Girls*, the Royal Shakespeare Company and, most recently, the role of Joyce in the film of Richard Osman's *The Thursday Murder Club*. She lives between London and Nice and has a son, Angus. His father was the actor Benjamin Whitrow.



At the moment I'm up at about five. I know it sounds rather romantic but I like to greet the sun as it floods into my room and hits the chandelier. It's one of my few luxuries and it took me two years to save up for it. Watching all the sparkling colours fills my heart with joy.

Breakfast is my favourite time of day. A cup of tea with masala spice, followed by lots of coffee. Then two slices of brown toast with butter, Marmite and lemon marmalade — all together. On Saturday I walk down to Notting Hill farmers' market and buy half a dozen misshapen eggs. They look so delightful.

I loathe gyms, so my only exercise is walking. If I meet a pal I prefer to walk and talk rather than sit on my backside in a coffee shop. I've got two lovely new hips, which have given me a lot more energy, but I don't like telling people about them because they assume I'm 98.

I could probably make a bit more effort when I'm out in the morning. If I see my reflection in a shop window I think, would Joan Collins be seen in that? Life is too short to be worrying about these things but I do. I don't like being the age I am and I don't like my skin looking the age it is, especially on a big screen. But I am not prepared to fiddle about with it. I'm just grateful I'm still healthy and able to work.

Luckily, I've never been seen as an ingenue and the parts I'm offered generally fit my real age. Like my character, Celia, in *Calendar Girls*, even though I was naked. And Joyce in *The Thursday Murder Club*. Gosh, what a thrill to be included in that line-up! Someone called us a cast of national treasures. I don't want to sound ungrateful but I always squirm when I hear "national treasure". Maybe I need to play an out-and-out baddie, someone who is quietly going about their business, murdering people.

WORDS OF WISDOM

Best advice I was given
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Advice I'd give
About acting? You have to want to do it or die

What I wish I'd known
I wish I'd run more and run faster, because now I can't run very fast at all

Lunch. Let's be honest, I'm no good in the kitchen. Food was a serious issue for me when I was a teenager. I developed anorexia and, although I don't like to linger on it, I am aware that young girls are still dealing with those same problems today. Part of the treatment in my day was electroconvulsive therapy. It wasn't nice and I don't think it helped in the long run. Thankfully, modern treatment isn't quite as brutal.

Because I'm a terrible cook, I'll often nip up to Drummond Street, near Euston station, for a takeaway bhel puri and eat it on a bench in Regent's Park. I can bake a cake, so I don't mind hosting afternoon tea. My son, Angus, lives close by — he'll vouch for my baking skills.

Yes, Angus is an actor and he's doing very well — he plays Josh in *The Archers* — but it was tough in the early days. Acting has always been like that. I started out as a pantomime chorus girl. I'd like to think acting is still a career open to everyone, but I do worry about the audition fees that drama schools charge. I'll probably get into trouble for saying that.

Eating out is one of the joys of living in London, but I try to limit it because I want it to feel special. I'm not averse to being asked out, but more often than not you'll find me sitting in front of the TV — I am obsessed with *Dateline*, the American programme about true-life crime — with a glass of wine. Just the one, though, and never before six o'clock.

I'm usually in bed by 9.30. If I conk out it means I've had a busy day. I enjoy being busy — it's nice to look back and feel proud of the work I've done. I miss Victoria Wood, miss being part of her gang. I am aware of time passing now more than ever. It's why I keep working and keep getting up at five. I want every day to count ■

Interview by Danny Scott. *The Thursday Murder Club* is available on Netflix. *Meet Me at Rainbow Corner* by Celia Imrie (Bloomsbury £8.99). To order a copy go to timesbookshop.co.uk. Discount for Times+ readers

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